

Akashic records
of bastard magic instructor

ロクでなし魔術講師と

禁断魔術 アカシックレコード

羊太郎

The author: Taro Hitsuji


ILLUSTRATION 三嶋くろね
Kurone Mishima

2



ファンタジア文庫

Akashic Records of the Bastard Magic Instructor



羊太郎

The author: Taro Hitsuji

ILLUSTRATION 三嶋くろね

Kurone Mishima

TRANSLATION yuNS

2

**AKASHIC RECORDS OF THE
BASTARD MAGICAL INSTRUCTOR**
– Rokudenashi Majutsu Koushi to Akashic Records –

- Volume 2 -

AUTHOR:
Hitsuji Tarou

ARTIST:
Mishima Kurone

[Translated by: yuNS translations]

Akashic records
of bastard magic instructor

ロクでなし魔術講師と 禁忌教典

アカシックレコード



2

ばあんっ！と派手に教室前方の扉が開かれる。

「話は聞いたッ！」

グレン＝レーダス

魔術嫌いな魔術講師。常時いい加減でやる気ゼロだが、その真相は——！

「ここは俺に任せろ、このグレン＝レーダス大先生様になッ！」

（——キモい）

なんとも悲しい統率力。

「競技祭は好きにしろって、言ったのはアンタでしょうが!!」

「……ややこしいのが来た」
瞬間にして、クラス一同の心情は見事に一致した。

システィーナ＝
フィーベル

生真面目な優等生。その性格ゆえにグレンへのツッコミは的確で厳しい

ルミア＝
ティンジェル

とある秘密を抱えている清楚で心優しい少女。システィーナの親友

「このときを待ってた！グレン！」

リエル＝
レイフォード

グレンの元・同僚。錬金術で
高速錬成した大剣を振り回
す、近接戦闘では無類の強
さを誇る異色の魔導士

アルベルト＝
フレイザー

グレンの元・同僚。帝国宮
廷魔導士団特務分室所属。
神業のごとき魔術狙撃を
得意とする凄腕の魔導士

「ああ、もう、ちつくしょう！
だから俺は働くなんて
嫌だったんだあああ——ッ!」

リン＝ティティス

グレンの担当クラス的女子生
徒。ちょっと気弱で小柄な小
動物的少女。自分に自信が
持てず、悩めるお年頃

ウェンディ＝
ナーブレス

グレンの担当クラス的女子生
徒。地方の有力名門貴族出
身。気位が高く、少々高飛車
で世間知らずなお嬢様

ギイブル＝
ウィズダン

グレンの担当クラスの男子生
徒。システィーナに次ぐ優等
生だが、決して周囲と馴れ合
おうとしない皮肉屋

そして競技祭当日……
「よし、みんな今日は頑張ろう！」

(ちっ……)

速え——間に合え——ツ！)

「させん——ッ！」

それは残像すら置き去りにする、
人の身により得ない
神速の踏み込みだった。

魔術師が魔術を振るう心臓に近い左腕。
それが動作を始めたのを
察知したゼーロスは、
迷わず疾風のように飛び込んで来た。



アリシア七世

アルザーノ帝国女王。ルミアの実母。穏やかな淑女ながら、類い希なる政治手腕で帝国の舵取りをするカリスマ

エレノア＝シャーレット

アリシア付侍女長兼秘書官。帝国大学首席卒業。公私に渡ってアリシアを支えるエリート

CONTENTS

- 005 — 序章 講師なボクが魔術競技祭に取り組むようになったワケ
- 012 — 第一章 エセ熱血講師、爆誕
- 056 — 第二章 魔術競技祭、開催
- 124 — 第三章 女王と王女の邂逅
- 179 — 第四章 いと懐かしき戦友達
- 217 — 第五章 白熱する表、激動する裏
- 266 — 第六章 真相、暗躍する悪意
- 299 — 終章 三年前のあの人へ
- 316 — あとがき


The record is wise and all-knowing. It creates and grasps everything.

For that reason, it will most likely

Guide humanity towards the path of destruction—.

“The Sky Fortress of Melgarius” by Rolan·Eltoria

Akashic Records of the Bastard Magic Instructor



PROLOGUE

THE REASON I, AN INSTRUCTOR, SEEMED TO MAKE AN EFFORT FOR THE MAGIC COMPETITION

Afterschool, at the headmaster's office of Alzano Imperial Magic Academy—

“—T-, That said, I'd like to be paid in advance. If possible, I'd also like to get some allowance as well, puhlease.”

“<Don't mess with me · You · Stupid idiot>-!”

Suddenly, whirlpool of crimson flames formed, and erupted into a violent explosion.

Serika's explosion spell mercilessly blew Glen – who had been speaking nonsense – away.

The aftershock of the explosion sent the glass of the windows flying, incinerated the lace-curtains, charred the walls, and turned the carpet into ashes. The gorgeous paintings, the antique bookshelves, the polished decorative armor, the sofa, the shade lamps, and a variety of other furnishing were not spared from the same fate. The interior of the headmaster's room looked nothing like it was a moment ago.

“Gack-!? Ga-, Geho!? W-, What do you think you're doing, are you trying to kill me you bastard!?”

Glen, whose burnt-black body lay on the floor, cried in rage.

“How annoying! You told me that ‘the survival of a species is at stake’ and said that we needed to have an important conversation, so I came all the way here, but then you give me this nonsense!?”

“What do you mean by nonsense!? If I die from starvation, then I'll go extinct right!? There's only one of me left in this world you know!? I'm a endangered species you know!? Treat me with care ok!?”

“Shut up, for all I care you can go extinct! Rather, I'll personally bring an end to an

inferior species like you!”

In the room where Glen and Serika began their pointless scuffle, the owner of the room – headmaster Rick – continued to sit still on his work desk and observe the situation. After a brief while, he interrupted the conversation.

“Well well, please calm down you two. Though, your conversation is staggeringly indirect in some sense... Basically, it’s about Glen-kun’s living expenses is it not...? And he primarily needs money for his food expenses yes?”

“Exactly. As expected of the headmaster, you get what I mean! My-, Serika suddenly told me to pay for my own food expenses you see-?”

“It should be a given! Your time as an unemployed bum aside, you’re now a magic instructor at this academy! You should have a respectable income!”

Serika irritably crossed her arms, and glared at Glen.

“To sum it all up, I’m in trouble this month headmaster! At this rate, starting tomorrow,, I’ll be partially forced into the plight of dieting....”

“However, wasn’t payday just one week ago? What exactly did you do with that money?”

In response to that question, Glen showed an expression filled with grief. He walked up to the window, and turned his eyes to the scenery outside.

Outside the window was the academy’s courtyard which was decorated by an impressive flowerbed of a hundred colors. Beyond the metallic fence of the academy was the antiquated town of Fejiti. Finally, floating high in the sky was the grandeur, phantasmal visage of Fejiti’s symbol, the Melgarius’ Sky Castle.

“You asked me how I used the money... Of course, I invested it into my future.”

“Invested in the future?”

“Yes, for the infinite possibilities that lies in what we call ‘tomorrow’, and for the sake of grasping onto a broader wish—”

In response to Glen, who looked into the distance whilst monologuing, Serika

interjected with murmurs.

“In other words, you gambled it didn’t you? Ah there’s really no saving you. Just go die already.”

“Can you stop? Despite all the trouble I went through to look cool there, you just had to throw in the bucket didn’t you.”

In response to Serika’s unrestrained comment, Glen sharply protested.

“To start with, this none of this is my fault you know? It’s the three-of-hearts’ fault! If I picked a card higher than that, then I would’ve—”

In any case, he was the prime example of human trash.

“—All’s said and done, please help me you two.”

“However... the rules are the rules, I can’t give you an advance payment.”

“Guh-, is that so... that’s troubling. Even the loan-sharks said that ‘We won’t loan money to someone of the likes of you who doesn’t even have a stable job’ and other fishy things. The food storage at Serika’s mansion also uses a magic lock, so...”

Glen, who seemed to fall into despair, pressed his palms against his face and took a deep breath.

“Hey Serika-kun. Until the next payday, could you lend Glen-kun some food expenses? He’s lived under the same roof as you for a long time has he not?”

Rick suggested such to Serika. Perhaps he was somewhat sympathetic of Glen.

“I refuse, headmaster. If I spoil this brat then he’ll do the same thing again in the future. In the first place, he deserves everything that he’s brought upon himself. Occasionally, he needs to learn his lesson. Well, until the next payday, work hard to stay alive ok?”

In contrast, Serika’s reaction was cold and blunt.

“If I were to only provide for his food expenses, then it will be on the basis of our former relationship. Well, that is, *if* I were to ‘only’ provide for his food expenses. That is the absolute condition, because I’m already turning a blind eye on his rent.”

“Hear that? Headmaster. Geez, this girl, why does she have to... She was always a really selfish person but... my my, how troublesome.”

Glen showed an amazed expression and sighed. Then, the corner of his lips curved upward into a sneer, and then he shrugged his shoulders and began to scornfully laugh.

“W—h—y, why are you speaking as though I have done something wrong!? The one who’s wrong is you isn’t it!?”

“He-, Kack!? My temples hurt! My head is gonna get crushed!? Save me mamaaaa—!?”

Serika grabbed Glen’s head with her hand, and constricted her grip with the extreme force. Grinding sounds could be heard.

Hearing Glen’s angstful cries, Rick showed a wry smile, and suggested.

“Although I can’t give you an advance payment, there’s still the possibility of a special award, Glen-kun.”

“Special award!?”

Glen shook out of Serika’s grasp, and quickly rushed towards Rick.

“What do you mean by that exactly?”

“I’m talking about the ‘Magic Games Festival’ that will be hosted by the academy next week.”

“Wh-!? M-Magic Games Festival...? What exactly is...?”

“Mhm. It is a competition of magical skills between the students here, and this will mark the third time that we – the Alzano Imperial Magic Academy – will hold this event. The groups will be split by class year, and the representatives of each class will compete in various magic competitions. The instructor in charge of the class that receives the best overall score will receive a special reward, as per custom.”

“The heck, are you for real!? So there was a wonderful event like this all along!?”

“It also happens that the class Glen-kun is in charge of will participate in the Magic

Games Festival next week as part of the second year's group. Since that is the case, how about you try working hard with the special reward as your goal?"

"Yes, I will do my best! Well, despite that, Magic Games Festival... To think there was something like this!? Keh-! If only I was told about this sooner...-!"

Hearing Glen's calculating mutters, Serika pressed her temple with an amused expressed, and coldly murmured.

"No, you, you're an alumni of this academy right? How could you not know about this? To begin with, the second years should all be riled up about it. To add onto that, this time around, the empress herself is—"

"Yeah yeah, that doesn't matter anymore! There are more important things that I must do! Tch—, those guys, hopefully they're still there but... — Till next time then!"

However, Glen did not even spare a moment to listen to Serika. It seemed that he had something on his mind, but he clenched his fists tightly, and turned on his heels to leave, dashing out of the headmaster's office.

Seeing Glen off, Serika released a long sigh.

"...So headmaster? In reality, what are the chances of Glen's class winning?"

"... To be honest, it will be rather tough."

Rick responded to Serika's question with a smile.

"It's true that Glen-kun's class has Sistina-kun, who has the top grades of her year, but... from a holistic standpoint, Harry-kun's class will more likely to come out victorious."

"Ah, the class Harry is in charge of hm? Well, after all, his class is excessively well-matched..."

"Mhm. His class has many top-scoring students, so their foundations are set in stone. Even in Glen-kun's class has Sistina-kun, it would be farfetched to put her up to the task of participating in every single competition."

"Participate in every competition ...hm?"

Then, for some reason, Serika sighed disconcertedly.

“Is this right Serika-kun? At this rate, your beloved disciple will really starve to death won’t he? Why don’t you give him a hand?”

“Well, there’s no need to worry about that, headmaster.”

Serika replied indifferently.

“Even if he has to eat grass or chew at sticks, he will surely find some way to keep on living. I’ve taught him about such things in the past you see? On top of that, it seems that it would be more interesting to leave him as he is right now.”

“...Oho?”

The headmaster, seemingly enticed by Serika’s refusal, curved his lips into a smile.

“His motivation might be ‘that’, but at the very least, Glen seems like he ‘feels like it’ right now. Recently, the ‘sports festival atmosphere’ has been spreading like a disease, and I was starting to get fed up with it, but... Now then, what will he do?”

Somehow enjoying herself, Serika showed a bright smile.

CHAPTER 1

THE PRETEND-ENTHUSIASTIC INSTRUCTOR, SUDDENLY APPEARS

After classes at Alzano Imperial Magic Academy, East wing, second floor—

At this time, all the students of year two, class two, were surprised speechless.

“Al-righty, is there anyone who wants to participate in the ‘Flight contest’?”

Sistina called out to the class from behind the podium, but no one answered.

All her classmates hung their heads downward, and only returned a funeral-esque silence.

“...Then, is there anyone who wants to participate in ‘Transform’?”

As should be expected, there was no response. The class continued to return an eerie silence.

“Hah~, this is hopeless... Despite the festival being next week, we still haven’t decided on our roster...”

Whilst shaking her head, Sistina exchanged glances with Lumia, who – as the scribe – was standing in front of the blackboard.

Lumia nodded once, and with a calm and unexpectedly clear voice, she called out to her classmates.

“Hey everyone. Since Glen-sensei told us ‘You guys do whatever you like’ for the festival, we’ve been given a rare opportunity, so why don’t we all try our best? I mean, for those who weren’t able to participate in the festival last year, isn’t this a special chance?”

Despite that, no one said anything. Everyone disconcertedly avoided each other’s gazes.

“...It’s pointless you two.”

A bespectacled young boy stood up from his seat and broke the silence.

The boy’s name was Gibel, who was the top performing student after Sistina.

“Everyone is afraid to do anything. I mean, it’s a given isn’t it? All the other classes will send their top-performing students to the each event, and no one wants to participate in a competition that they’ll lose anyway... right?”

“...But, now that we have the chance...”

Ignoring Sistina’s sullen rebuttal, Gibel continued.

“Not to mention, the empress herself will be spectating the magic competition for second years as a special guest. No one wants to embarrass themselves in front of the empress you see?”

Although what Gibel said was distasteful, it truly aligned with the feelings of the class.

“More importantly, Sistina, isn’t it about time for you to get serious?”

“...But I have been serious?”

“Haha, you sure are good at joking around. Right now, you’re giving incompetent people the chance to compete out of sympathy, aren’t you?”

Hearing the cynical words that came out of Gibel’s faintly smiling lips, the members of the class all turned their heads to face him.

“Look, thanks to your exorbitant suggestion, even the competent people whom were qualified to appear in the festival are cowering... Isn’t this enough already?”

“I-, I didn’t intent to do th-!? And for you to call everyone incompetent...-!

Raising her eyebrows, Sistina replied in a flustered manner.

Gibel ignored her replies, and spoke without sugarcoating his words.

“That’s enough lip service. Back on topic, hurry up and distribute the games roster

amongst the high performers such as you and myself. If we don't do that, then against the other classes... especially Harry's, we have no chance of winning."

"Winning's not the only goal there is to this competition right? Also, we've already done that last year... I feel like doing that is super meaningless..."

"Winning's not the only goal? Meaningless? What are you saying, you. The Magic Games Festival is not something where 'meaning' matters or not right?"

Gibel objected, and laughed scornfully.

"In this academy where it's rare for one's magic abilities to be compared to another, 'Who possesses the greatest skill in magic?' – Isn't this a great opportunity to make that clear?"

"That might be true, but...-!"

"On top of that, a lot of graduates of this academy... such as bureaucrats in the ministry of magic and imperial court magicians, will be watching this competition. For those who aim to work in the same field in the future, this is a one-of-a-kind chance to appeal to them. Thus, is it not a given that top-performers such as myself should be given more chances to prove myself?"

"Hey, do you really think that way...!?"

Sistina angrily stared at Gibel.

However, Gibel readily ignored it, and continued his argument.

"Also, the class that wins this year will have the honor of receiving their medals from the empress herself. You should understand that such a chance is priceless right, Sistina? So like I said, stop arguing just cause you feel like it, and act a little more mature by solidifying our roster with top-scoring members of our class. You could say that this is for the sake of our class as well."

"Gibel... you, that's enough—"

The atmosphere in the classroom was terrible, and Sistina, who understood that, could no longer hold her anger. As she raised her voice to speak—

Bom-ta-ta-ta-ta— the sounds of someone dashing down the corridor leading to the classroom could be heard... In the next moment, ‘Bang!’, the door to the classroom was slammed open in a showy manner.

“I’ve heard it all! Leave the rest to me, the great Glen Ryders-sensei-sama—!”

Saying that, he meaninglessly brandished the coat that hung from his shoulders.

ばあんっ！と派手に教室前方の扉が開かれる。

「話は聞いたッ！」

グレン＝レーダス

魔術嫌いな魔術講師。常時いい加減でやる気ゼロだが、その真相は——！

「ここは俺に任せろ、

このグレン＝レーダス大先生様にな

（——キモい）

なんとも悲しい統率力。

「競技祭は好きにしろって、

言ったのはアンタでしょうが!!」

「……ややこしいのが来た」

瞬間にして、クラス一同の心情は見事に一致した。

システィーナ＝
フィーベル

生真面目な優等生。その性格ゆえにグレンへのツッコミは的確で厳しい

ルミア＝
ティンジェル

とある秘密を抱えている清楚で心優しい少女。システィーナの親友

Standing in the open doorway – with his finger thrust high in the air, his chest raised to an unnatural level, his body twisted, a flirtatious gaze, and a proud gesture – stood Glen, whose movements combined to form an interesting pose.

“...So the nuisance arrives.”

Sistina pressed a hand against her head and sighed.

In front of the students who had been stunned by his sudden entrance with unknown purpose, Glen pushed Sistina aside, took a stand at the podium.

“Stop fighting you guys. Nothing will come out of this... More importantly—”

Glen showed a glimmering, refreshing smile, and said—

“Are we not all comrades in arms that are united for the singular purpose of victory?”

–Gross

His leadership was pitiable. Such much so, that for a moment, the members of the class were united as one.

“Well, how should I say this...? You guys are running into problems at the roster stage?”

Disregarding the mood of the classroom, Glen continued to talk at the beat of his own drum. Actually, this was how he usually was.

“Geez, what are you guys doing? Are you guys motivated at all? The other classes have already decided on their roster, and are doing special training for the festival you know? My my, this is the difference in mindset between you guys.”

“The one who’s unmotivated is you isn’t it sensei!?”

Hearing Glen’s overbearing remarks, Sistina barged into the conversation.

“In the first place, when I asked you about the festival a few days ago, you told me ‘do whatever you want’ didn’t you!? So what are you trying to do right now!?”

“...Eh?”

Towards the unexpected response, Glen was at a loss for words.

“...I, said that? No, I really don’t remember at all.”

“Ah... you’re really are as annoying of a person as I thought you were. You don’t listen to what other people are saying at all...”

Faced with Glen’s ever-unchanging attitude, Sistina felt extremely exhausted.

“Well, let’s not worry about that. Since you guys can’t come to a decision yourself, allow me, the grand director that leads this class, to use my decisive judgment capabilities becoming of a super charismatic magic instructor, to decide on the roster for the festival. First thing’s first—”

With a burning, ambitious passion in his eyes, Glen grandly announced.

“If I will take on the leader position, then let’s win alright? We’ll go full force, and I will guide all of you guys to victory. That’s why we’ll draft our roster like this. Also, no playing around, remember that.”

The classroom became noisy. Since he was usually such a cold-blooded creature, it was hard to imagine him being so heated up about anything. The students of the class all turned to look at one another.

“Oi, white cat, give me a list of events of the festival. Lumia, excuse me for troubling you, but could you list all the events and names in the order that I say them?”

“I told you to stop calling me a cat... Geez!”

“Yes, I understand, sensei.”

Sistina, dissatisfied, handed over the list. Lumia picked up a piece of chalk.

“Hmpf.”

Glen, with a serious gaze, looked through the list of events and the rules.

“Hey, oi, white cat, are the events for each year the same?”

“Nope. With a few exceptions such as ‘Battle’, the list of events are pretty much

completely different. Completely new events will be suddenly added to the list, and even the ones that look the same at first glance have completely different rules...”

“I see, so they’re also testing the student’s ability to adapt. Which means... Hmpf....”

Looking at Glen’s expression, Sistina released a small sigh.

Geez, why is he suddenly motivated like this?

After a variety of incidents, Glen had become the magic instructor in charge of this class. Although the quality of his classes were high, the person himself was uninterested, if not slothful, regarding all matters related to magic research. Not only that, he would belittle the revered teachings regarding magic, and often times one would need to ask him the same question several times to get their point across. Either way, he was seen as an eyesore that wasn’t qualified to be a magic instructor... All of this, was basic knowledge regarding Glen for members of the academy.

However, Sistina knew that, although Glen was usually an annoyance, he was still someone who would stake his life for the sake of someone else when it really mattered; He was a passionate person at heart.

Since she knew this side of Glen, despite how she lectured him on a regular basis, she recognized that when it came to decisive matters, it was better for her to not intervene too much.

The same applied to the current situation. Rather, if he was motivated, she thought that it would be fine to let him do whatever he liked.

But... how should I say this...? This is a bit unpleasant...

At heart, Sistina was feeling a bit dejected.

Glen had said that they would win with full force.

To win with full force meant that the students with average grades would be left out, and that all the events would be monopolized by the few top-performing students of the class. In the end, the roster would be no different from last year.

Hah.... Why does he have to be motivated at this time...

In reality, Sistina was undoubtedly amongst the top five of her grade. Evidently, the roster had been decided on the same basis, and she was able to participate in the Magic Games Festival for first years... but it was uninteresting. It was completely different from what her father had told her. In the past, all the members of the class would participate, and everybody would be in high spirits, and a festive mood would ensue. However, at some point in time, this standard had been abandoned.

That's why when she heard Glen tell her to 'do whatever you want', she felt relieved.

If everyone could participate, then it would surely be fun.

She will definitely make it a fun Magic Games Festival like the one her father had told her about — That's what she thought.

However, seeing Glen's engrossed and serious expression as he looked at the list, she believed that a fun festival like her father had described would not happen this year either.

'Hah', as if giving up, Sistina released a solemn sigh.

"...Alright, I got it."

Glen raised his head. It seems that he was about to announce the roster.

"Alright listen in you guys. First, for the event with the highest points 'Battle' – Sistina, Gibel, and ... Cashew. You three will participate in this."

Eh? At this moment, all the members of the class tilted their heads.

The 'Battle' event of the magic games festival was an actual 3-on-3 magic battle, and was the event that was given the most attention. It was a given for each class to select their three strong members.

However, if the roster for the event was chosen with grades as the basis, then after Sistina and Gibel should be Wendy. So why was the spot given to Cashew whose grades were worse than Wendy's?"

Even Cashew himself was unable to hide his inkomposure.

However, Glen ignored the troubled feelings that arose from his decision, and

continued.

“Erm, next... ‘Speed Decryption’. Wendy’s the only possible choice for this. ‘Flight Contest’... Road and Kai would be suitable. ‘Spirit Defense’... Ah, Lumia has to do this one. Erm, from there, for ‘Search and Unlock contest’— For ‘Grancia’—”

As the participants were listed one by one, the students noticed that no person appeared in more than one event. As usual, the high-point events were assigned to top-performing students, but the average students were also evenly distributed amongst other events. It would appear that Glen wanted all forty members of the class to appear in one event or another.

Didn’t he want to win with full force? Didn’t he say that there was no playing around?

“—then, lastly, let’s leave ‘Transform’ to Rin. Alright, all the roster slots are filled aren’t they?”

Glen finished announcing the participants for each event. In the end, not a single person was disregarded. At the bare minimum, each person participated in one event.

“Any questions?”

“I can’t accept this-!”

Amongst the noisy students, the twin-tailed girl that had the presence of an ojousama, Wendy, wildly stood up from her seat.

“Why wasn’t I chosen for ‘Battle’!? My grades are better than Cashew-san’s aren’t they!?”

“Ah—, about that...”

Glen pressed his hand against his temple, and said with a slightly bitter intonation to his voice.

“It’s true that your spells learnt, magic knowledge, and magic capacity are all outstanding, but, you have some teensy shortcomings you see—? Your ability to adapt to sudden situations is weak, and you occasionally fumble your chants.”

“Wha—!?”

“That’s why I judged that Cashew, who has better athletic ability and situational adaptiveness despite knowing fewer spells, would be more suitable for the ‘Battle’ event. I apologize if I displeased you. In exchange, you will participate in ‘Speed Decryption’, and isn’t that your specialty? In terms of ability with [Read · Language], not a single person will complain if I say that you stand head and shoulders above everyone else. So I’ll leave this to you. Please get the points for us.”

“W-, Well... if that’s the case... Although I feel irritated by what you said...”

Although angry, Wendy didn’t try to argue any further, and dejectedly returned to her seat.

Following Wendy, many other students raised their hands to ask why they had been chosen for a specific event.

“Cause in the end, [Levitate · Fly] and [Gravity · Control] are both gravity-control type black magic, and at the heart of it, black magic is the same as techniques used to control movement and energy. Kai, you should be able to do it.”

“Teresa, during our alchemy lab a short while back, you used [Psy · Telekinesis] to clean up the remains of a flask that someone dropped right? You might not have noticed this, but you have an affinity for telekinetic-type white magic, especially long-range control techniques.”

“‘Grazia’ focuses far more on teamwork than individual play. Since you three always get along well, aren’t you guys the best choice? Not to mention, you guys are good at Synchro-chanting.”

However, each of the student’s inquiries were met with a clear and concise answer.

Basically, it appeared that though some students didn’t particularly stand out, Glen had a grasp of each of their individual merits. Based on that knowledge, he had drafted the roster for maximum potential.

Although no one knew why Glen was suddenly motivated, and it was impossible to deny that there were a few inefficiencies if his objective was ‘to win with full force’. However, it seemed that Glen had thought through this in his own way, and drafted what he believed was the best.

Not to mention, this...

Sistina looked at the names written on the blackboard. Fundamentally, each of the students were assigned to the events that made the most of their individual abilities. Although a few students were assigned to an event outside their merits, it was events where their merits could be adapted to make it work. It would appear that he had taken everything into consideration. It could be said that, had he not intently observed the students and become familiar with their strengths and weaknesses, he would not be able to create this roster. Glen usually seemed like he had no interest in the students he was teaching, but it appeared that he had kept a close eye on them the entire time.

Although he's pretty hopeless as a person... occasionally, he can do these sort of things...

Looking at Glen, who responded to the student's inquiries, Sistina showed a slight smile.

“—Now then, anymore questions?”

Glen scanned the classroom.

It seemed that at this point, there was no one who objected Glen's lineup.

“Then, I guess it's decided then?”

Although he was already laughing on the inside, Glen asked once more time just in case.

Fu—, my, I suppose that's a job well done...

All said and done, Glen only had one goal – to win. Regardless of what happens, he had no choice but to win and pocket the special reward, for the sake of living on.

Rather, I refuse to die of starvation. If Serika says she won't help, then she really won't help, 'cause she's a cold hearted person.

Thus, although victory couldn't be assured, he had no choice but to put everything on the table to secure the highest chance of winning. Although it was still a festival in reality, it would be troubling for him if he let everyone choose the events they wanted to participate in. For the sake of winning, he had no choice but to be sly with the roster.

In this manner, he would push towards his first objective. If all forty students of his class were aiming to win, then his roster suggestion should undoubtedly be the best.

Fuu.... Since I already pulled a few tricks, there's no value in anything other than winning, the winners are always right after all... Well, if I could, I would use Sistina for every single event, but huh...

<TL Note: Glen uses half of the saying (勝てば官軍...) 'The winner is the government's army, and the loser are the bandits, which is essentially the Japanese equivalent of 'the winner writes history'>

It was true that the roster utilized the class' talents to the fullest, but it was impossible to make up the difference in individual ability between the top-performing students. Glen understood that. At the very best, the roster was enough to be competitive in each of the events. If he really wanted to secure victory, then he would probably have to assign all the top-performing students to every event.

...But that's obviously against the rules huh... Well, it can't be helped I guess, I do my best to use these forty people and challenge myself to maximize my chances of winning...

As Glen was thinking that—

"My my... Sensei, can you cut it out already?"

One of the students relaxedly stood from their seat. It was Giel.

"You keep saying that 'We'll win using full force', but there's no way we can win with this roster right?"

"Hm...?"

Could it be that you thought of a roster with a higher chance of winning?

'If that's true, then I'll definitely use it'— For Glen, this was no longer a problem of an instructor's pride and dignity, it was the difference between life and death.

"Oho? Gibel. That means you have a roster in mind that has a higher chance of winning? Alright, let's hear it."

"...Uhm, sensei, are you seriously saying that?"

Unable to hide his irritation, Gibel spouted those words.

“Isn’t that obvious!? Just have the top-performing students participate in every single event! That’s the standard for each year, and all the classes are doing it too aren’t they!?”

“.....Eh?”

Glen froze.

Eh? What? That’s alright? Although his body was frozen, his thoughts continued to ceaselessly flow. Anyhow, it seems that he now realized that he had made a terrible mistake.

Ah, the heck? So you could use the same person multiple times, and it’s a standard? Then let’s do just that. Heh—, yes—, oho—, hmm—...

Having heard that, Glen was fist-pumping on the inside.

Alrighty.... Guhehe, the current roster is sly enough as it is, but since the opportunity presented itself, I won’t hold back. I’ll take the slyness one step beyond...-!

In particular, I won’t hold back on using Sistina. This white cat girl might be cheeky, but she’s still excellent without a doubt. As cheeky as she is, if I put her into as many events as I can, then my chances of victory will definitely jump.

“Hmpf... I guess you’re right, if we do that...”

As Glen was about to approve of Gibel’s suggestion—

“What are you saying, Gibel!? After all the thought that sensei put into it, you’re trying to pick it all apart?

The girl that rebutted Gibel was none other than Sistina.

Hey-, yo-, wh-, why are you objecting Gibel—!?

Without a clue of Glen’s unease, Sistina faced the entire class, and pleaded to the them with a sincere expression.

“Everyone, look! Look at the roster than sensei has thought up! He has fully considered our strengths and weakness, and given each and every person the chance to play an active role in the festival!”

In response to Sistina’s pleading, the class entered a commotion.

‘Now that you say that...’, ‘It’s true that...’. From everywhere in the classroom, such whispers could be heard.

Hey... You guys... don’t get persuaded... I beg you...

“Despite all the thought that sensei put into it, are you all just going to shrink back and do nothing!? Are you going to give a meaningless excuse such as ‘I don’t want the empress to see my unsightly appearance’ to back away from participating!? Is that in itself not unsightly!? If you really believe that, how could you even possibly dare face the empress!?”

Whatever with being unsightly or unable to face her, just please stop saying such unnecessary things...

“To begin with, if we win by only having the top-performers compete, then what’s the point of this festival? Sensei said ‘We’ll go full force, and I will guide all of you guys to victory.’ had he not!? There is only a meaning to what he said if we all do this together!”

Then, Sistina turned and said.

“Right, Sensei!?”

The expression on her face was one that was rarely shown to Glen – A rare, impregnable, refreshing smile.

“Y-, Yeah....”

He had no choice but to say this. If he were to say ‘nope’ at this moment, then he would become nothing short of a supervillain.

“I-, It’s just as Sistina says....”

“Ah, that’s right... Even we....”

And then, the class' atmosphere clearly indicated that they would follow Sistina.

Ah, don't back down—!? Hey, wait a second you guys! This is a problem of life and death you know!? I'm gonna die of starvation you know!? Do you guys even understand!? Goddamnit!

At this point, he can only bet on his final safety net, Gibel.

Give it your best! Don't lose Gibel-kun! Make the white cat eat your dust with a super-comeback!

Glen sent an imploring gaze towards Gibel, but...

"Fu, my my. You never change do you, Sistina... Well, fine, if the class all agrees on that, then do whatever you like."

Gibel reseated himself, a cynical smile on his face.

You bastard, aren't you a bit too weak you little herbivore of a boy—!?

"Well, let's see what you can do then, Sensei?"

This annoying little—! There's nothing that I can show you!

In response to Gibel's provocation, Glen could do nothing but scream internally.

Then, to Glen—

"Ahaha, everything turned out great didn't it? All according to sensei's plan, right?"

Saying that, Sistina let a chuckle slip.

T-, This girl... Is she mocking me!? Me of all people!? She's really means it doesn't she!? Not only that, she's hitting me with irony where it hurts...-!?

Glen could see nothing but the devil's smile on her face.

C-, Could it be, that this girl... grasped my plan!? If that's the case, then what a despicable person you are, blight cat...-!

“Well, since sensei seems to be finally be motivated for once, and even gave it his all to think of this roster, let’s do our best everyone. I’ll look forward to what you can do, sensei~”

“Y-, Yeah... Just leave it to me....”

Sistina, who was in a particularly rare good mood, showed a somewhat eerie smile towards Glen.



Hm... I can't help but get the feeling that they're not on the same wavelength... I wonder why?

Lumia gazed upon them with a wry smile.

In the week leading to the Magic Games Festival at Alzano Imperial Magic Academy, there was a practice period allotted specifically for the events.

Fundamentally, there were only three lectures during this period, the first and second classes in the morning, and the third class in the afternoon. After these classes ended, the rest of the time was devoted to magic practice under the supervision of the instructor.

“Hah....”

Afterschool, at the courtyard that was filled with growing grass and surrounding by coniferous trees—

Glen leaned his back against a suitable tree, and gazed at his students, who were practicing for the Magic Games Festival, from afar. He seemed to be rather exhausted.

There were students that chanted their spells and practiced flying in the skies.

There were students that used long-range telekinetic-type abilities to play catch ball.

There were students that chanted attack-type spells, and struck the trees with beams of electricity.

On the other side of the courtyard, Sistina and Lumia spread a spellbook open on the bench, and – with troubled expressions – wrote something on the sheep skin paper. The various students surrounding them seemed to be discussing something. It seemed that the girls were organizing the magic techniques that they would use for the competition.

As of now, Glen's class was silently fired up about the Magic Games Festival that was set to happen a week later.

“Geez they sure are passionate... they don't even consider my feelings...”

As if his passionate yesterday was a lie, today's Glen was nothing less than downtrodden.

Since he saw it. The members that would participate in the other class that is.

He used the summoning magic [Call · Familiar] to summon a rat, which he used to scout the other teams, but as expected, all of the other classes seemed to have excelling or even famous students participating in multiple events. Against a team filled with outstanding talent, it wouldn't be wrong to say that the students of Glen's class didn't amount to anything... Well, it wasn't quite that exaggerated, but simply said, there was a great difference in individual abilities. No matter how he looked at it, it wouldn't be easy to win.

Glen's fate of 'death by starvation' was no longer just a joke, it would soon become a reality.

"Damnit, how unfair... Using nothing but excelling students. Do these people have nothing but winning on their minds!? There are things that are more important than winning right? Damn!"

It was true that he wanted to fill his roster with nothing but top students, but that thought had already been long lost.

"Tch... Should I do what I must and change up the roster? Within the bounds of a supervising instructor..."

Right now, the devil was whispering into his heart.

However, Glen glanced at his students.

Everyone seemed to be having fun. Yesterday they did nothing but cower away and back down, but now, none of them seemed to sweat the small things, and were probably looking forward to participating in the festival. It was because of their liveliness that they were intent on practicing for the events that they would appear in.

Seeing that, visions of his past seemed to flash through his mind.

"Magic Games Festival... ah, now that I think about it.... When I was still a student here... there was something like that wasn't there...?"

Seeing the happy looks on the students as they practiced, Glen finally remembered. It seemed that the academy has a tradition that was something like the Magic Games Festival, but he had completely forgotten about it until now.

“Well, let’s not force it too hard. When I graduated from this academy, I spent three years doing nothing noteworthy... On top of that, I didn’t ever participate in the festival did I...?”

His memories as a student of this academy seemed to drift through his mind.

At that time, the malpractice of separating participation in the Magic Games Festival by students’ grades had already begun. Although only those who were below average were cut from consideration, Glen, who was a below average student, was automatically disqualified. Thinking back, Glen, who was three to four years younger than the students of his class, was most likely treated as an outsider by his classmates and friends.

That’s why, despite the high-spirits of the class and the students, Glen only spectated from afar, all alone. For Glen, these were boring and lonely memories, and as a result of having been treated the same for three years in a row, not a single shred of interest in the festival remained.

Since they were such dark memories, it was more or less a given that they would be forgotten. If he wasn’t in charge of a class that was participating in the games festival, he probably wouldn’t have ever remembered.

“Tch... Making me remember such things...”

Hatefully murmuring to himself, he once again looked at his students, who were all giving it their best.

“Hah... Geez, what an underhanded bunch... Ah, it’s impossible like this, for real....”

Winning is probably impossible. What can I do in a week? I can’t think of anything.

I can’t think of anything, but—

Amongst the students that were practicing, there was not a single one that was lonesome, nor was there anyone that merely spectated.

“Hah... My oh my.”

Glen scratched his head and stood up.

“...Well, whatever I guess.”

Murmuring to no one in particular, Glen showed a refreshed expression.

“In any case, I just gotta deal with the food problems first don’t I? I can’t look forward to the prize money, but I’m gonna politely decline the option of starving to death. There are shroty trees growing in this academy aren’t there... If it’s branches from those, then I can figure something out until the next payday...”

He hadn’t filled his stomach with anything but water since yesterday. With no other recourse, Glen decided that he would search through the academy’s forest for edible wild grass or sticks. It was then—

“You guys have been nothing but selfish this whole time... Just quit it already!”

Suddenly, angry voices could be heard from the distance.

“...What?”

In a bout of annoyance, Glen turned towards the direction of the voices. It seems that the students of his class were arguing with the students of some other class, and started a dispute in the courtyard.

“...Oi you guys, what happened?”

Since he couldn’t leave it be, Glen sighed to himself, and walked towards the source of the disturbance. The students in question were grappling one another, and both of them seemed like they would burst at any time.

“Ah, sensei!? These guys came after us, but they’re telling us to move away—”

One of the students of Glen’s class, Cashew, agitatedly ranted.

“Shut up! Seeing your oversized group messing around is an eyesore! We’re going to be practicing now, so go somewhere else!”

The student that was fighting with Cashew seemed to be just as agitated.

“What did you say—!?”

“Alright alright, STOP~”

Glen grabbed Cashew and the other student by the nape of their necks, and forcefully pulled them apart.

“Ack ack... O-, Ow.... My neck...”

“Uoo... I-, I can’t... breathe....”

“Christ, don’t fight over such petty things alright.... Your EQs are way too low.”

Confirming that the two of them were now obedient, Glen led go of his hands.

Having been released from Glen’s hold, the two of them fell to the floor and gasped for air.

“Erm, you over there... Judging by that badge, you’re from class one right? Are you guys gonna practice now?”

“Eh... Ah, yeah. That’s right... Uhm... this is where Harry-sensei told us to go...”

After being suppressed by Glen’s brute force, the two fairly large-framed students seemed to grow timid. The students of class one took a step back, and tackled the situation in an admirable manner.

“Hmpf, I see...”

Glen scratched his head, and looked around the area.

“Mm, well, it’s true that we’re taking up too much space... Sorry ‘bout that. We’ll move ourselves to one side, is that ok with you guys?”

“I-, If you can clear some space, then that’ll be fine...”

It seems that everything was wrapped up somehow, and the students who were observing the situation unfold were relieved.

“What are you doing, Kreiss!? Didn’t I tell you to secure a spot!? So why isn’t it clear!?”

A man in his mid-twenties entered the stage, together with infuriated cries. He was a bespectacled, sensitive man that wore the robe bearing the mark of an owl, which showed that he was an instructor of this academy. His name was—

“Ah, Yu-ray-senpai, wassup?”

“It’s Harry! Harry! It’s not Yuray or Harem-! It’s Harry Astray-! Glen Ryders, just how many times do have I have to tell an imbecile like you my name until you remember it!? Rather, you haven’t remembered my name at all have you!? Not in the slightest! Am I right!?”

The two of them gave the impression of being old friends.

Towards Glen’s lighthearted greeting, Harry showed an astounding reaction.

“...So? Is, erm, Ha-... something-senpai’s class is coming here to practice for the festival?”

“...You little... can you really not remember my name?”

With clenched, trembling fists, Harry moved on to the main topic, not wanting to waste time with idle talk.

“Hmpf, well fine, you asked whether my class is practicing for the festival right? The answer should be more than obvious. Not to mention, my class will be taking the victory as well. Under my guidance, anything other than victory is unforgivable! Furthermore, the empress will be present as a special guest this year, and will be the one to present the medals. The only one suitable for such an honor is none other than myself!”

“Ah-ha-ha! Damn, you’re so passionate about this! Well, give it your best, senpai!”

Faced with Glen’s playful attitude, Harry disdainfully clicked his tongue.

“More importantly, Glen Ryders, I heard about it. Do you really intend to have everyone in your class participate in the festival?”

“Eh? Ah, mhm, yeah, well, it happened didn’t it... it’s not exactly what I had in mind

though.”

“Hah! Are you throwing away your chances of winning already? Actually, have you thought of what you’re going to say when you lose? Or are you just afraid of the class that’s under my guidance?”

Glen awkwardly shook his head.

For some reason, this Ha-something guy is really hostile towards me. I didn’t really do anything, but he’s just flaming me in a one sided manner. Well, it wasn’t much at first, but now that I think about it, I feel like that he started being hostile when I started to teach my classes seriously... I don’t really get the cause and effect behind this.

Well, it’ll probably be fine if I just give him a suitable response.

“No, that might actually be true you see— I mean, after all, Ha-... something-senpai’s class is filled with top-performing students you see— And my—, it’s pretty much decided that senpai’s class is gonna win you see— Ah—, I’m so jealous of the empress’ medal you know—”

Seeing that Glen was set on playing the fool, Harry irritably grit his teeth.

“Tch... what a coward. Well, fine, just hurry up and clear out of our practice area.”

“Ah— yes yes, immediately. Erm, would it be fine if we just moved to the space over by that tree?”

Glen took the space that each of their students needed to practice, and proposed a fairly proper distribution of space, but—

“What are you saying? I’m telling you and the rest of your class to move out of the courtyard.”

Hearing what Harry said, all the students of class two froze up.

Even Glen couldn’t help but press his fingers against his temples and protest.

“Senpai... no matter what, that’s a bit too much isn’t it... You’re being a tad unreasonable.”

“What’s unreasonable about this?”

Harry spat those words.

“If you’re being serious about this, then I have no problem with evenly distributing the practice grounds with you. However, you’re not motivated at all are you!? Not to mention, you let these poor performing students... You’re planning to work with these hindrances after all!”

“—!?”

“To begin with, your class has no plans to win, but to take over the practice space with a mob of useless small fry is nothing short of an annoyance for everyone else! If you know what I mean, then hurry up and get lost!”

Hearing such terribly demeaning words, the expression of the students from Glen’s class darkened...

—There’s no way we can let a failure like you participate in the glorious festival right? Glen.

—If you know what I mean, then hurry up and scram. You’re nothing but a burden!

The way the students overlapped with someone, from somewhere, from sometime...

“Ah... geez, come on. It’s just one thing after another today isn’t it? ...Ah—, I’ve had enough of this...”

Glen, who suddenly said such things, ignored the students, who were unable to hide their troubled feelings, and suddenly pointed his finger at the dead-center of Harry’s nose. In conjunction with that movement, he flipped the robe that rested over his shoulders.

“About what you said, senpai, this is the best assignment for my class. You’re saying that I’m motivated? That I’m throwing away my chances of victory? Fu-, don’t talk bullshit would you? Of course we’re after it as well. Victory, that is. Well, feel free to

belittle us however you like, just try your best to not let us blindside you alright?”

Curving his lips into a sneer, Glen showed a daring smile.

In response to Glen’s mysterious pressure, a sweatdrop formed on Harry’s forehead.

“...Ku, you can say whatever you like, but in the end you’re all talk. However, in reality, all you’re doing is that you’re making the excelling students of your class such as Sistina and Gibel play around aren’t you...-!”

“Hm? I see... Basically, erm... Ha-? Something-senpai thinks that my class’ composition is just for show, flimsy, or something like that right...?”

“E-, Exactly... what else could it possibly be!? Repeatedly using your top-students is practically a formality! It’s not just my class, all the other classes in every single year are doing it as well!”

“Ku-Ku-Ku... So it seems that it’s not just you. Rather, it seems that all the instructors at this academy are useless blockheads... No—way, no way, could it be that you thought that you could win just by putting top-performing students in every single even...? Fuha—HA-HA-HA-! I’m dying over here!”

Said Glen. His laughter was somewhat villainous.



“Alright senpai? We will win with everybody. Everybody, got that? If we’re all moving towards the same goal, then say anything you want about ‘who’s the main force and who’s the hindrance’, none of it matters. It’s all for one, and one for all. The feeling of unity is the best strategy you know? You understand me?”

“Ku-... you think that kind of illogical, spiritual theory will work...!?”

However, in response to Harry’s rebuttal, Glen stuck out his chest proudly and replied.

“Three months of wage.”

“Wh-, Wha-!?”

“My class will win, and you will give me three months’ worth of wages.”

In response to Glen’s announcement, not only Harry, but even the surrounding students were bewildered.

In particular, the students of Glen’s class looked at him with open-mouths.

“A-, Are you serious, you imbecile...-!”

“Now then, whatcha’ gonna do senpai? Will you take this bet? My, perhaps three months is a bit too much? If you lose then your research is gonna get stalled for a while isn’t it...?”

“Gu...u...-!”

To instructors, wages had a special meaning. Compared to professors, the amount of budgeting they got for research was nothing more than a drop in the ocean. As a result, in order to make some achievements, and for the sake of advancing their own research, instructors of this academy had no choice but to fund their research out of their own pockets. Although magic instructors had a fairly high payline, they were often just barely scraping by.

Of course, Harry too, would like to avoid the risk of losing three months worth of pay. If he were to lose it, then during that period, Harry’s magic research would undoubtedly be slowed.

I don’t believe that I would lose, but it’s still a matter of chance. No one knows how it will

turn out.

Furthermore— this Glen person's strangely confident expression, and nonchalant attitude.

Does he have some sort of strategy in mind—?

“Ku... fine!”

However, before the students, there was no way that Harry could back down.

“The same applies for me! My class will win, and you will give me three months worth of wages!”

With sweat trickling from his face, Harry disdainfully announced such.

“Fu-... As expected of you, senpai. You got guts. I like that you know? It wouldn't be the same if it wasn't like this... Ku-Ku-Ku-... My, I'm extremely grateful, se—n—pa—i.”

With unmatched composure, Glen showed a intrepid smile.

“Tch-...-! I-, I'll make you regret ever messing with me...-!”

With a hateful sentiment, Harry stared intently at Glen.

The students observed the two with bated breath.

Then—

...Now I've done it -----!

Although he held a firm, daring smile on the surface, on the inside, Glen already had his arms around his head.

I felt a bit irritated for some reason when he was making fun of my students, but I've actually done it this time! Oi oi, what am I gonna do? This ain't a joke anymore! There's no way I'll be able to survive for three months without real food! I'll die you know? It's not like I'm the sage of the east or something...-!

Simply put, Glen's attitude might be imposing, but he was frightened to the core.

Strategy you say? Of course that doesn't exist.

"Damn you Glen Ryders... An imbecile of a man like you...-! As mere third-rank third-rate magician who doesn't have a single speck of pride as a magician, you dare belittle me...-!"

Uwah—, he's angry now... He's really really angry now.... A-ha-ha, shit. What am I gonna do!?

Right now, Glen had nothing but regret for his reflexive words and provocations.

Alright... dogeza it is. In this kind of situation, I have no other choice. Right now, I will desperately and sincerely beg for forgiveness and mercy— Now, bear witness to my special original magic [Moonsault · Jumping · Dogeza]—

As Glen was about to make a world record for throwing vanity, pride, and embarrassment—

"That's enough, Harry-sensei."

A calm, cool voice interrupt Harry from saying anymore before Glen could prostrate himself.

"I will not forgive you if you belittle Glen-sensei any more than you already have."

The one who spoke was none other than Sistina, who had arrived on the scene at some point.

Why do you have to appear with such timing, you little white cat—!?

Glen was on the verge of tears.

"You are Sistina Phebell!? The prestigious house Phebell's... ku-!?"

Harry was visibly shaken by Sistina's intervention.

"To start with, the way in which you dealt with the matter regarding the practice grounds was far from reasonable. However, your contempt attitude towards Glen-sensei is unjust! If you plan to continue any further, then a problem may occur with the higher-ups in the academy regarding your unfit morals as a magic instructor.

Would you like that?”

“Ku-...!? Y-, You little smoocher...-!”

In contrast to Harry’s bewilderment, Sistina showed a composed smile.

“Even if you didn’t result to such vulgar methods, Glen-sensei won’t hide or run away. At the Magic Games Festival a week from now, my class will compete fair and square against yours...”

Sistina, who was overjoyed for some reason, turned to face Glen with eyes full of expectation.

“Right, sensei!?”

“Y-, Yeah...”

He had no choice but to say this. If he were to say ‘nope’ at this moment, then he would become nothing short of a supervillain.

“Damnit, remember this, Glen Ryders! I’ll make sure to crush your class first at the combined events! Wash your face and get ready for it!”

Why does the hurdle keep rising? Someone save me...

Tears began to flow from his heart—

“Don’t ever come here again.”

In contrast, he gave Harry a thumbs down, before running his thumb across his throat in a threatening gesture. Something such as ‘an inevitable series of events’ existed in this world.

Harry loudly exhaled from his nose, and angrily turned to leave.

Although he avoided one disaster, another super-mega-bomb was about to drop directly on Glen.

“... I misjudged you, just a little bit.”

Said Sistina to Glen. The silver-haired girl combed her hair upwards, and absentmindedly turned her eyes around the area, unsure where to look. Her face seemed to be somewhat red. Perhaps she had a cold?

“I didn’t think that you would go that far to protect our practice grounds.... Although I know that you’re someone who will push comes to shove, but... I mean, sensei is... you’re usually like you usually are and... seeing it once again... uhm...”

“It’s not like I did it for you guys or anything...”

“Fufu, you’re being modest?”

Of course, it was not modesty, but rather, an undeniable truth.

“To stake a price and compete using their own skills is a magician’s’ art.... Mhm, in the end, sensei is a magician at heart!”

Why is she happy? This girl...

“It’s fine, just leave it to me, sensei! Since sensei has this much faith in us, we will definitely win! Hey, isn’t that right, everyone!?”

In response to Sistina, everyone strongly nodded their heads.

What’s the basis for that response you guys.... You’re only having fun cause you guys have nothing to lose, damnit....

In the end, he was merely reaping what he sowed, but he tried his best to pretend that he didn’t know it.

On this rare occasion, Sistina showed a happy smile towards Glen.

And to Sistina, Glen returned a patient, but resentful smile.

“Hm... I can’t help but get the feeling that they’re not on the same wavelength... I wonder why?”

Lumia gazed upon them with a wry smile.

The days leading to the Magic Games Festival continued to pass.

In the end, (due to an inevitable series of events) everyone that wanted to participate in the festival was now participating. Glen, who (appeared to have) fully considered each and every one of the students (on the surface), was a stronger unifying force for the students than anyone had expected.

The students of Glen's class were all in high spirits, and for the sake of winning, they all desperately practiced and studied. They were already at the point where they had no fear of losing to the top-performing students of other classes, nor the fear of embarrassing themselves in front of the empress.

For the sake of the once-in-a-lifetime, 2nd year Magic Games Festival, everyone gave it their best.

On the other hand, Glen also responded to the student's passion (as there was no way he'd sit idly and allow himself to starve to death). Although his passion seemed a bit ghastly, he worked hard to help the students practice and study.

"Erm, 'Grazia'... is a three-person event this time around huh. If there are the same number of teams as there are classes, then there are a total of ten teams. However, given the scheduling of the games festival, there's no time for a tournament style bracket. On the day of the event, lotteries will be drawn to decide three matches, and the rankings will be calculated based on the score difference... Hmpf."

Holding the rulebook to this year's games festival, Glen murmured to himself.

Today, Glen was in the classroom giving strategic guidance to the students that were participating in 'Grazia', a traditional team-battle game that involved creating barriers.

<TL Note: Reminder, 'Grazia' is a game in which points are scored by occupying space using a barrier>

"With those conditions... Alright, listen up you guys. Use a conditional activation sequence."

Glen turned his eyes away from the booklet, and faced the students that were participating in the event – Alf, Bicks, and Shesa.

"In 'Grazia' the most important aspect is the speed at which you can construct the

barrier isn't it? That said, I used a familiar to observe the other classes a little bit, but... their speed is undoubtedly faster than yours. Each class is putting everything they can into practicing barrier formation speed. If we fight them directly, then our zone will be invaded and that'll be the end of the story."

"Then what should we do?". The students showed such questioning expressions.

"The way to fight against that is a conditional activation sequence. What I mean by conditional activation sequence, is a passive magic-sequence that activates when certain conditions regarding the corresponding field or object – which are set at the beginning – are met. We'll be using this for our strategy."

"A conditional activation sequence... right?"

Hearing about that, the students furrowed their eyebrows with bitter expressions.

Most magicians had pretty poor impression regarding conditional activation sequences.

"Well, it's not going to make you look cool I guess, since it is a conditional activation sequence after all. As I said in the lecture a little while ago, it's a wretched, ancient sequence that's infamous for being used in curses and geises. 'If X and Y isn't done, then you will die' kind of feeling... Well, forget about that."

<TL Note: 'Geis' is read as 'Geis', but written as 'constraint' 制約>

Composing himself, Glen returned to explaining.

"Let's review conditional activation sequences then. The strengths of this technique is that, if it's completed, it will automatically activate. Since it doesn't emit any magic power while it's dormant, it's also extremely hard to detect. The weaknesses is that you are unable to choose the timing at which you activate it, and the timing at which it activates is completely dependent on the action that your opponent takes."

Glen wrote the strategy on the whiteboard.

"In a three-man 'Grazia', the standard is to have two people on offense and one person on defense, where the two-man group occupies a position, while the one-man group destroys the other's encampments right? However, all three of you will be on defense. Focus everything into destroying the opponent's encampment using 'Field · Break'. Compared to creating one, destroying is a lot simpler after all."

“But, if we do that then we can’t win...”

“That’s right, if we do that, then no matter how hard we try, we can only force a draw...”

“The goal is to make them think that we’re going for a tie”

‘I don’t really want to play this kind of dirty strategy, but well...’ thought Glen, as he scratched his head.

“I don’t want to say this, but compared to your opponents, you guys are weak. Our opponent’s pride will not allow them to accept a tie, and since the rankings are based on point differences, they will try everything they can to win with a big point margin. Thus, if the stalemate continue for long enough, they’ll definitely try to use ‘Absolute · Field’.”

“That’s the type of barrier that’s complicated to construct, but can’t be destroyed once it completed, right?”

“Ah, yeah. To add onto that, since they want to score big, they’ll definitely go for a huge scale one. That’s where you guys come in. You guys will create a super-broad field that will completely control the entire area, and the condition for its activation is ‘if the opponent creates an Absolute · Field that is beyond a certain size’... in order to obstruct the opponent. Our opponents will never suspect that a team that seems like it’s going for a tie, would try to turn the match on its head for a dominating victory... probably.”

With a slip of the tongue, Glen revealed his slight lack of confidence.

“Could it be that we’re going for a ‘Silent · Field · Counter’!?”

“For us, such a high-level strategy is...”

“But, you guys don’t have any other choice right? If we don’t try this then we’re going to lose one-hundred percent.”

Faced with the harsh truth, the students turned silent.

“That said, if the opponents are calm then we’ll lose either way. If our opponents go for a small ‘Absolute · Field’ to guarantee their victory, then we’re out, since the activation conditions won’t be met. However, we can’t set the activation conditions to

apply on such a small field either. The strength of the sequence's effect goes hand-in-hand with the difficulty in which the conditions are met. If we go for something too simple, then the tables will be turned in the remaining time after the field activates."

Clicking and clacking the chalk against the blackboard, Glen wrote out the details of the strategy.

"The key is to force our opponents into using this large-scale skill. Thus, the deciding factor of this strategy is how quickly we can destroy their 'Normal · Field's. That's why you guys need to put extra practice into 'Field · Break'. Rather, let's just say that that's all you guys need to do. Got it?"

"U-, Understood, sensei!"

From a distance, Sistina and Lumia were gazing at Glen.

"He sure is passionate about this... Does he really plan to win with all forty of us..."

"Hey Sisti. From the side, sensei's serious and hard-working expression actually looks pretty cool doesn't it?"

Sitting beside Sistina, who seemed impressed, Lumia happily laughed.

"...Not really. To start with, given how he is usually, it would be troubling if he wasn't at least serious every so often."

"Fufu, how dishonest~"

"...W-, What do you mean?"

Regardless of that, however, the two of them had an unresolved question.

"But, why is sensei... growing paler with each passing day?"

"Mm... maybe he has a cold?"

This was the greatest mystery of the Magic Games Festival.

Like this, a week passed by in a flash.

Today was the opening day of Alzano Imperial Academy's Magic Games Festival.

And the day that the Alzano Empire's empress, Alicia the seventh, would arrive at the academy—

CHAPTER 2

THE MAGIC GAMES FESTIVAL, BEGINS

The first light of daybreak, which peeked from behind the hills, swept away the veil of darkness, and signaled the beginning of a new day.

In this hazy, misty morning, there was a horse-drawn carriage travelling on the road that linked the northern area, Itelia, and southern area, Yorkshire. The carriage, which was pulled by four gallant horses, was decorated with gold and silver. In any case, the extravagance of it all indicated that the carriage was one that was exclusively used by noblemen and aristocrats.

As if to bring the question to rest, the carriage bore the emblem of a spread-winged eagle — The mark of imperial royalty. This was the royal carriage, and only those with remarkable pedigree were allowed to ride on this carriage.

All four sides of the carriage were surrounded by bodyguards, which each rode atop a military horse. Each wore a scarlet-colored surcoat that bore the insignia of shield and wings, and carried a rapier at their waist. This was the uniform of the royal guard of the imperial army, whom were primarily tasked with the defense of members of royalty.

The royal guard were a group of elites that were adept in swordsmanship, and were trained in standard military-grade magic. As a result, each and every member bore the pride of being amongst the few selected to become part of the royal guards, carried a strong sense of duty, and overflowed with sharp and dominating vigor.

Closest to the carriage was a military man who was worlds apart in both appearance and the spirit in his eyes. With white hair that contrasted with his black beard, sharp gaze, and a body that was riddled with ancient scars, he gave the impression of a veteran who had experienced countless battles.

He was the commander of the royal guard, Zeros. Although he was already well past his prime, his martial spirit that had been forged during the God-reverence Wars forty years ago still burned bright.

Suddenly, a metallic ringing noise resounded through the area. Hearing that, Zeros

reached into his waist pocket, retrieved half of a gemstone, and pressed it against his ear.

“Report.”

Said Zeros, with a stern and overbearing tone.

“Yes sir! The fifth and sixth unit are about 1-kilometer ahead, and are patrolling the surroundings. For now, we have not seen any traces of bandits or magic-beasts.”

He heard about the situation of the advance group from the gemstone.

“Mm, well done. However, don’t get careless. Although we are in an era in which the army will police the streets, an era in which the citizens can travel without bodyguards, right now, we are escorting the Empress. Do not forget that, and earnestly carry out the task that you have been entrusted with.”

“Yes sir!”

Cutting the transmission, he returned the gemstone to his pocket, and continued to cautiously observe the surroundings.

He would execute any suspicious individuals that drew too close, and if necessary he would use his body as a shield.

He carried such a clear and firm conviction.

Under the watchful protection of Zeros and the royal guard, it was unthinkable for any harm to befall the important figure residing in the carriage — Such a thought would naturally appear in the minds of the bystanders looking upon the grandeur appearance of the escort.

The lady residing inside the carriage – the Empress of the Alzano Empire, Alicia the seventh – looked through the laced-curtain at the gallant figures.

Alicia was a lady with long golden-hair, and a gentle gaze in her eyes. She bore a noble presence that would make others naturally straighten their backs, as well as a calm temperament that would not back down from any circumstance. Although she was already in her late thirties, her appearance, which had once been called ‘The White Lily of Alzano’, had not withered at all. Rather, it seemed all the more refined. However,

Alicia was not wearing the royal dress that symbolized the authority and dignity of the royal family, but rather, a simple black and beige colored dress that was suitable for the going outdoors. Despite that, it was still impossible to suppress the grace and dignity within her.

“We will soon arrive at Fejiti, won’t we, your majesty.”

Sitting next to Alicia, was a lady in her mid-twenties. She wore a headdress, apron, and garter-belt – which combined into a servant’s costume – and had black hair and black eyes.

Her name was Elenora. She was a talented woman that was tasked with taking care of Alicia as the head maid, assisted with governmental affairs as the chief secretary, and even acted as Alicia’s bodyguard. Once ago, she had graduated at the top of her class in Alzano Imperial College political-economics division, and reputed to have first-rate skill in both swordsmanship and magic. Based on her abilities, she was chosen to be the assistant to the Empress. As of now, she carried the official rank of ‘lower-fourth seat’ that was a cut above high-nobles, and became an existence that supported the Empress regardless of whether it was personal or work.

“Yes, that’s right, Elenora. It’s been a while since I’ve been to that academy.”

Showing a gracious and gentle smile, Alicia looked out the window of the carriage, in the direction of its destination. Past the vast grassy pasture and the gentle meandering of the road, she could see the walls of Fejiti – More symbolic than that, was the majestic appearance of the phantasmal castle in the sky.

“However, if the academy’s teleportation formation wasn’t destroyed by that resentful group, your majesty wouldn’t have to exert yourself so greatly...”

A teleportation formation was a magic facility that was assisted by a super-high level ritual-type magical technique, and allowed one to travel a great distance in mere moments. Since the formation had to be laid on ground that carried spiritual veins, it couldn’t be freely created anywhere in the world. Aside from the large amounts of time and money that was required to create one, the people that were able to use the formation were limited to those that were adept at control magic – only magicians, and that in itself was the greatest shortcoming.

However, in this inconvenient world where travelling was limited to horse-drawn carriages, walking, and boats, such convenience was unparalleled. Although a railroad

powered by the recently invented steam engine was amongst stipulations that the government was currently invested in, but it was still far from practical use. So as of now, there was no substitute for a teleportation formation.

There used to be a teleportation formation that linked Alzano Imperial Magic Academy and the Imperial Capital Orlando, but it was destroyed in the terrorist incident a month prior, and had yet to be restored. As a result, the Empress had no choice but to spend several days to travel to Fejiti on a horse-drawn carriage.

“This is nice occasionally.”

Hearing Elenora’s anguished words, Alicia showed a mischievous smile, placed a finger across her lips, and winked. Although she was already of fair age, it was oddly suitable for Alicia, who currently had the unexplainable presence of young girl.

“Leaving the castle, staying away from politics, and seeing the outside world has been very enjoyable. Also, it’s not bad to occasionally take a break from the annoying yapping of those grandpas.”

“Hah... your majesty... if Lord Edward heard that, he’d burst into tears.”

In public, Alicia was cold-hearted, serious, strict, and authoritative – a remarkable figure without weaknesses; however, Elenora was one of the few who knew that her master was unexpectedly mischievous and childish.

“In any case... you seem to be in a good mood, your majesty.”

“Fufu-, you can tell?”

Alicia looked distantly at the destination of the carriage.

“My daughter... after three years, I might get to see her again.”

“Her highness princess Alumiana... yes?”

However, in response to Alicia’s anticipation, Elenora remonstrated her with an apologetic tone.

“Your majesty, I understand how you feel, but...”

“I understand. It goes without saying that I should avoid direct contact with her. From a distance... From a distance, if I could see that child’s lively appearance for just a little bit, that would be enough...”

‘But... if possible’ — muttering those words soundlessly, Alicia grasped the locket-pendant that hung from her neck. For a member of the main line of the royal family, this oval brass pendant was rather simple.

Alicia opened the locket, and inside was a monochrome portrait that had been taken by a camera. It was a harmonious picture of Alicia and two young girls from which vestiges of Alicia could be seen. One of the girls had been exiled by her own hands three years ago.

“Your majesty, that is?”

“I really just can’t... I can’t throw this away. Even though I’m the Empress who has no choice but guide the nation in the right direction, even though I had no choice but to forsake that child, I... am unqualified to be an Empress.”

Said Alicia in a self-deprecating manner.

“There is no such thing. Your majesty has skillfully suppressed the political factions and schemes from the den of thieves known as the imperial government. If it wasn’t for your majesty, this nation wouldn’t be able to stand on its own feet. Also... while you are the Empress of the Alzano Empire, you are also a mother...”

“...But, I’m sure that that child hates me.”

Lightly sighing, Alicia closed the locket.

Seeing that, Elenora continued with a faithful attitude.

神妙 (faithful), can also mean ‘mysterious’ in some contexts>

“I understand that this may be disrespectful, but may I speak, your highness?”

“What is it?”

“That locket-pendant... if some rare extenuating circumstances were to occur, then it may cause problems, so during our visit to Fejiti, I would like to store it somewhere.”

“I suppose so. The world will not always go our way... However, what should we do? Is there any accessory that we can replace it with... Elenora?”

“Yes, I understand. I will go look for a suitable replacement.”

Elenora retrieved a jewelry box from under the seat, and started to look through it.

After a short while, Elenora retrieved a necklace from the box.

It was a golden necklace that was fitted with a jade-green jewel.

“Fufu, your majesty. How is this?”

“Ah, how pretty, but this is the first time I’ve seen it. Where did this come from?”

“Yes, this is a top-of-the-line article that is suitable for her highness. I bought this a few days ago from a jewelry store that I am acquainted with. I’m sure that it is a suitable accessory for your majesty.”

–She saw, a dream.

To Lumia, this was a dream that she had already seen many times.

That’s why, ahh, this dream again... Such a thought appeared in her disordered mind.

“Hick... uu... Mother... Mother...”

A beam of light shone through the pitch-black darkness, at her young, crying self.

“No.... Don’t throw me away... I will be a good kid... I will be a good kid so.... I wouldn’t be selfish anymore so... please don’t hate me...”

When I was young my mother meant the world to me. So when she abandoned me, I believed that I was hated by the entire world. ‘I’m a child that no one wants’ – That’s the feeling I had.

Despite that, I would timidly look at my surroundings, as if I was looking for my mother, who had glared at me coldly as she exiled me, as if I was looking for someone who would be my ally.

However, in place of that what came into view was—

“Hiii—!?”

Corpses. Corpses that were spilling with fresh blood were scattered around me. Because of my inferiority complex that formed from being abandoned by my mother, I would throw a tantrum at the family that took care of me every day. One day, I was suddenly faced with the corpse of an evil magician.

Surely, this person was sent by my mother who hated me, in order to kill me, the bad child that she had abandoned. I don't know why those magicians were now dead, but... That view was like a message from the world itself – that ‘there is not a single person who would be your ally’... As though it was giving me a subtle hint about my future.

“A-, A-, A-, Ahhhh—!?”

I'm scared. I'm scared. I'm scared. My emotions spilled from my body.

The grief of being abandoned. The fright of being kidnapped. The disgust towards the bloodied corpses.

To me back then, everything had pushed me past my breaking point.

“I don't want this anymore! I can't take this anymore -----!”

Burying my head in my arms, I began to cry.

“Why...-!? Why does this only happen to me!?”

As I screamed in the darkness—

“... Stop crying. Calm down.”

From behind me, came a dark, low, and cold voice.

I reflexively turned towards the source of the voice. Standing there was a black-haired, black-eyed, black-coated – completely covered in black – man. He looked down at me with stone cold eyes.

“—Heeeiii!?”

I thought that my heart had stopped. My mind, which had rejected the situation until now, suddenly understood everything.

Yes, this is the person that killed those evil magicians.

When this person took out a strange piece of paper, for some reason, the evil magicians were all unable to use their scary magic... Then, using a fearsome gun-like weapon, he slaughtered them. Even though they were begging for their lives at the end, this person didn't show a hint of mercy.

And – Surely, I was next.

“N-, Noooooooooooooo-!? No, help!? Someone, someone help me!”

“Uwah, I messed up!? D-, Don't cry!? I'm your ally! Your ally!”

“Liar-! There is no one who would be my ally! There is no one in this world who would be my ally! Even my mother, even my mother abandoned me -- mmpf!?”

He suddenly pushed me down on the ground, and pressed his hand against my mouth.

At that moment, my heartbeat rose so much from my fright that I thought that my heart would break. The freezing, painful chill that ran across my back felt as though a sword of ice had been embedded in it. My consciousness, which was like a boat being tossed about by a heavy storm, quickly became a blank, stagnant slate. I desperately struggled in a bout of insanity, but since my hands and legs were pressed down, there was nothing I could do.

I'm going to be killed. I'm finally going to be killed. I don't want to die. Help, someone help.

I don't want this. I don't want to die alone in this kind of place. I don't want this. I don't want this—

–But.

“I. Am. Your. Ally.”

Slowly, word-by-word, he tried to persuade me.

He urged me on with a desperate, but sincere gaze.

Little by little, my tensions faded like a receding tide, and I calmed down.



“.....-.....-.....-!”

Even so, my fears didn't disappear. The wrenching, crackling beat of my heart ceased to stop. Tears would not stop streaming from my eyes, because the person in front of me had killed those people in cold blood. I'm scared of this person. It's unbearable. I'm so scared that I feel like I'll die.

However, to me, who was trembling in fear, the person looked at me with eyes full of sorrow for a mere moment. Then, he said.

“Please. There are still enemies around. We can't make it out with the way you are.”

“...—!”

“Be afraid of me as much as you like, I don't mind. However, if you could stop crying –
-----”

.....

“Lumia—? Come on, you need to get up...”

“...Munya?”

Being shaken gently, Lumia awoke from her dream and returned to reality.

“Huh?Erm—”

Lumia opened her sleeping eyes to the room of the Phebell residence that she shared with Sistina. In the room lay a glamorously designed carpet, a candle-stand on the wall, and shiny, oaken chairs and tables. Although the room was decorated conservatively, each and every ornament was a high-class product.

Wearing long and comfortable negligee, she hugged her feathered blanket and lay sprawled out on the bed.

Next to the bed stood Sistina. In addition to her usual academy-attire, she also wore a sword belt around her slender waist. Attached to the belt was a beautiful rapier with a curvaceous handle, which was the traditional battle attire for magicians. The reason she wore this was probably due to the opening of the Magic Games Festival later today.

Turning her eyes to the mechanical clock on the wall, the time was already past seven. The warm, morning light shone through the windows, and was accompanied by a gentle, refreshing wind that lightly shook the curtains. It seemed that the weather today would be quite fine.

“... You’re early, Sisti.”

“I mean, well, I, erm, have something I have to do... More importantly, today’s the day of the Magic Games Festival isn’t it? Father and Mother don’t have work to do either. You should get up soon.”

“Mhm, you’re right...”

With a soft ‘fuwah-’ yawn, Lumia rose from her bed.

“I’ll be waiting downstairs... Don’t fall asleep again alright?”

“... I wouldn’t~”

“Well, even though I say ‘again’, it’s already happened three times before.”

二度’, which stands for twice or ‘two times’>

“Ahaha, did that happen?”

After exchanging a wry smile, Sistina left the room, and Lumia sluggishly crawled out of bed. The soft fur of the carpet made her feet feel slightly itchy.

“It’s been a while since I’ve seen that dream hasn’t it...”

In her slightly disoriented mind, Lumia thought about the contents of the dream.

About three years ago, she completely forsook the identity of ‘Alumiana’, which she had lived with until that day, and was forced to continue living as ‘Lumia’. She was then taken in by the Phebell family.

Stemming from the feelings of self-loathing caused by her abandonment by her mother, she had been unable to believe in anything. She believed that there was no ally in this world, that she was alone, that she was the most unfortunate child in the world. It had been a ruinous, stormy period of her life.

Having been mistaken for Sistina, Lumia had been kidnapped, and then, she met Glen—

“Why is it that even now, I dream of what happened that time...?”

She had already put all that behind her.

Thinking further about it, the results of her mother’s doing was not all bad. She had been able to become friends with Sistina, and most of all, she had been able to meet her savior, Glen. Although she was dissatisfied that Glen had no recollection of the time, regardless, she was able to live life facing forwards. Unlike the time as the caged bird Alumiana, she was now able to find a new goal in life.

She was sure that she had already put that all behind her.

“...Mmm, I’ve put it behind me... or at least, that’s what I think...”

In any case, she knew full well why she saw that dream.

It was because that person – the one who had forsaken her once upon a time – would be at the academy. The culprit behind everything that unfolded in her dream would be at the academy on this very day. It would seem that that fact was more of a burden then she thought it would be.

“.....”

Lumia reached for the oval brass locket that had been placed on a small round table next to the bed, and opened it. There was nothing inside. No, to be precise, there had been something pasted inside it in the past, and there were traces of something being ripped out.

For a brief moment, Lumia looked at the pendant without uttering a single word. Finally, as if to shake something off, she lightly shook her head, and closed the locket.

Her two hands grasped the chains of the locket, and connected them behind her neck.

“Alright, let’s give it my best.”

With a single motivational cheer, Lumia moved towards the closet containing her clothes.

Finally, the reception for the Empress would soon begin.

In order to welcome the Empress, the members of the academy huddled around the front gate. A human wall was naturally formed around the path that stretched from the front gate to the main building of the academy. The royal guard which had arrived ahead of time looked intently at their surroundings and pushed the overflowing students back.

Right now, the members of the academy gathered here were all waiting nervously for the Empress' arrival.

"Anyway... is the Empress really gonna come today?"

Standing at a corner of the frantic human wall, Glen alone was no different from usual, and tried to play the funny-man.

"You, just what stupid things are you trying to say now!?"

Sistina, who stood to the left of Glen, exasperatedly yelled at him.

"Ahaha, she should be coming around now alright? The Empress is very mindful of these sorts of things after all. I mean, she often goes out to various places of the empire in order to observe the people."

Lumia, who stood to the right of Glen, could only smile wryly in response.

"No, I mean, isn't the capital really far from here? The teleportation formation can't be used right now... If I were the Empress, I definitely wouldn't come cause it'd be too much of a pain."

"Don't compare a house-sitter like yourself to the likes of the Empress! That's just plain rude isn't it!?"

With a 'puh' sound, Sistina hit Glen square in the back.

Although she hadn't used much force, Glen staggered forward from the blow.

"...Sensei!?"

Lumia hurriedly moved forward, and put her arm under Glen's shoulder to support

him.

“Ugh... Sorry. Anyway, if she’s gonna come I hope she hurries up... Even if I’m just standing like this, I’m reaching my limit... Hah, my stomach...”

It was then—

“Make way for the Empress~! Make way for the Empress~!”

Guards on horses quickly moved through the human corridor whilst shouting.

Hearing that, the music group began their welcoming marching-parade. The rest of the students erupted into a series of cheers and applause.

The explosive volume of the crowd silenced everything else. Finally, an extravagant carriage surrounded by guards composedly travelled through the human corridor. Empress Alicia the seventh stuck her body out the carriage’s window, and waved her hand in response to the student’s cheers and applause. In turn, the volume of the crowd increased even more.

As though she alone had been thrown into an alternate dimension, Lumia looked distantly at the scene. Regardless of whether it was the cheers of praise for the Empress or the energetic clapping of the crowd, it all came on deaf ears.

Lumia subconsciously reached for the locket that hung from her neck, and opened it.

Inside was – as expected – nothing.

“Is that... a locket? ... But there doesn’t seem to be anything inside.”

In response to Sistina’s gaze, Lumia flusteredly closed the locket, and shook her head.

“A-, Ahaha, it’s nothing, there’s nothing really.”

As if glossing over the topic, she turned her eyes to the welcoming parade.

“Anyway, the Empress is as popular as ever isn’t she... Not to mention she’s really pretty as well... I can’t help but look up to her...”

Seeing Lumia’s unnatural attitude, Sistina confirmed her suspicions.

“Lumia... As I thought, you...”

Lumia Tinsel was not her real name. Lumia’s real name was Alumiana Eyl Kel Alzano. Carrying the legitimate bloodline of the royal family, she was formerly second-in-line to succeed the throne – Simply said, she was the princess of the Alzano Empire.

Originally, Lumia was an important figure that would not meddle in this sort of thing. However, three years ago, it was discovered that she was born with supernatural ability that made her an ‘Emotion Amplifier’. Thus, due to various political circumstances, she had succumbed to sickness on paper, and her very existence had been erased.

The situation was extremely complicated.

The founders of the Alzano Empire’s royal family shared the same genealogy as that of the royal family of the neighboring nation Rezalia kingdom. As a result of this, the Alzano Empire and the Rezalia kingdom would often have disputes regarding the legitimacy of rule and the ranking of authority between each nation. To make matters worse, the Imperial Church, which guaranteed the legitimacy of the royal family’s rule, had branded the inner circle of the Holy Elizareth Church, who were the legitimate successors of the Rezalia Kingdom, as heretics. As a result of this, the relations between the two churches were strained.

In the midst of these circumstances, a demon spawn, or in other words, a supernatural, was found amongst one bearing the royal bloodline.

If by some chance, Alumiana’s existence was leaked to the outside world, then it would be impossible to avoid political turmoil. The dignity of the royal family as the supposed descendants of god would fall to ruins. Furthermore, if this were to be known by the Rezalia Kingdom and the Holy Elizareth Church, which often tried to annex the empire, then it might lead to a second God-reverence war.

Regardless of whether the Alzano Empire was good or bad, it was a nation whose people firmly believed in the royal family’s divinity. Thus, Alumiana’s existence was a vicious plague that could shake the empire at its very core.

To avoid this, it was announced that Princess Alumiana had died from sickness, and it was decided that she would be dealt with in secret. The Empress and Imperial government, who were obligated to support the nation and protect its people, were forced to make a painful decision.

At the very end of the road filled with ulterior motives and dastardly schemes, Princess Alumiana – now Lumia, found herself at Sistina's side.

Until recently, Sistina had not even a hint of knowledge of Lumia's grand identity. However, as someone who was credited with resolving the incident a month ago, and someone who was close to Lumia, Sistina had learned of Lumia's true identity from the upper echelon of the government in absolute secrecy. After that, she had been asked to cooperate in order to keep Lumia's identity a secret.

Finally, because she knew of Lumia's identity, Sistina was able to easily imagine what was going through Lumia's mind.

"Hey Lumia... Are you alright?"

Sistina stuck close to Lumia, so that no one else could hear their conversation.

"Hm? What do you mean by that, Sisti?"

Lumia, who responded with the same soft voice, seemed no different from usual

"Erm... I mean, your real mother is... you know..."

It was impossible to tell if there were any vacant ears nearby. Since they were in a public area, Sistina could not say anything affirmative, so she spoke in an ambiguous manner.

"Thanks for worrying, Sisti, but, mhm, I'm fine. After all, my current parents are Sisti's mother and father."

"...Right."

With an expression of mixed feelings, Sistina looked at the side of her friend's face.

"Then Lumia... you, erm, don't have any feelings for your real mother... anymore?"

"Mhm... I mean, I'm really blessed you know? I'm with Sisti and mother and father, and they're all really nice people..."

Lumia grasped the locket tightly and showed a fleeting smile.

“Lumia...”

Overcome with an unbearable feeling, Sistina was at a loss for words. The person in question said that they felt really blessed, so Sistina couldn't find anything to say.

Glen silently observed the two.

It's not that he read the mood, but rather, if he were to say anything, the only sound that would come out was the sound of his empty stomach.

The Magic Games Festival would be held at the magic stadium situated northeast of the academy grounds.

The stadium was built with stone, and was constructed in the shape of a circular arena. At the center was a grassy field that was used for competitions. The three-story spectator stands were situated so high that it seemed disconnected from the stadium itself. From a bird's-eye view, the stadium must've looked like a fukazara.

The stadium itself was also outfitted with various magical gimmicks. Using a unique governing-spell from the control room of the stadium, the field could be filled to the brim with water to create a pool, become overgrown with trees to create a forest, be engulfed in a sea of flames, or simply be a stone-formed stage. Simply put, it was a stadium that could fit the requirements of a variety of competitions.

Right now, the spectator stands of the stadium were overflowing with people and their energy.

Flowing into the stands were not only students, but also parents, alumni, and various people connected to the academy. At the balcony-style VIP stand located at the highest point of the already high stands, where the view was at its best, the Empress's silhouette could be seen.

In a nation where the usage of magic was restricted in public areas, a competition of magic skills was an irreplaceable entertainment for magicians, regardless of whether they were participants or spectators. This year too, spectators came en masse from in and out of the academy, and the stadium was filled with bustle and activity.

The Magic Games Festival, which involved competitions between classes of the same year, were held three times annually. It was divided between first, second, and third-years. This time around was the competition for second years. Fourth-years were

often busy with their graduation-related research, so a competition was not held for them.

The only ones who would receive public recognition at the very end were the members of the class that placed first overall. There was no meaning in second or third place. It was all or nothing. It was a method of recognition that followed right in the footsteps of the orthodox principle of magicians: 'To use everything at one's disposal'.

To add onto that, limited to this time's second year's games festival, the Empress herself would attend the awards ceremony to personally bestow the medals upon the victors; An honor that would be envied by any citizen of the empire.

As a result all the students involved in the Magic Games Festival, and the instructors of each class, would do anything in their power to win... Such passion was involved in the second year's Magic Games Festival this time around.

Amidst all this, there were rumors going about the academy regarding year two class two, that is, the class Glen was in charge of. For whatever reason, despite the circumstances, all the students were to participate in the competition. Regardless of their grades or academic performance, all the students would get their fair chance to participate.

'Glen doesn't care about victory or defeat does he? As should be expected of a man without a single hint of the pride or attitude of a magician. However, I'm sort of jealous that all the students of Glen-sensei's class would get to participate... No wait, isn't it disrespectful to the Empress if he didn't at least try?'

...In the one week leading until now, such murmurs could be heard all around the academy.

Amongst the rumors going about, the one regarding Glen picking a fight with Harry, and putting three months' worth of wages on the line was a particularly hot topic.

That said, although it had drawn curious eyes, no one had any expectations of Glen's class, nor did anyone think that Glen's class would be competitive at all.

Finally, the time arrived. The students, in their traditional battle attire that consisted of the rapier that hung from their waists, proceeded towards the center of the field, and lined up into organized columns. The opening ceremony began. The opening words, the national anthem, the ceremonial address from those involved, the oath of

the student representatives — all the formal rites proceeded strictly and smoothly.

Finally, with a word of encouragement from the Empress, the Magic Games Festival finally began.

———.

The exterior of the stadium were lined with poles placed at regular intervals. The players, who were stationed just outside, activated their flying magic, and cut through the wind.

For this event ‘Flight Contest’, two people would form a team, and would take part in a repeat baton-pass relay consisting of twenty laps through a set-course on the wide academy grounds.

And now, the race was entering its last legs. Due to the unexpected developments, the students sitting on the spectators stands cheered on the players that were currently making a large turn towards the stadium.

“And now they’re turning the last corner-! Road-kun from class two, Road-kun from class two has—! O-, Overtaken—!? What is this-!? Could it be, could it be that class two will— What on earth—!?”

The live commentator using a sound broadcast spell, Earth from the Magic Games Festival Planning Committee, excitedly rose his voice and made strange noises. Putting aside the teams that came in first and second, he seemed to have some attachment to the team from Glen’s class two.

“And they reach the goooooaaaalll—! What is this!? Class two has placed third in ‘Flying Contest’! That class two has placed third—! Could anyone, could anyone have anticipated such a resuuuuuuult—!”

The sound of applause and cheers flooded forth like an open dam.

The source of the applause primarily came from those who weren’t able to participate in the games festival. Although they were not from the same class, they seemed to be excited nonetheless.

“Class four, which was in the running for a ranking, was overtaken at the very last moment! What a great turnaround—!”

The class that placed first was of course, Harry's class one. However, since it was a given that class one would win, the valiant efforts of Glen's class two, whose loss seemed set in stone, caught the attention of the spectators instead.

On the other hand, in the standby area for participating classes—

"We did it! We got third place, sensei! Road-kun and Kai-kun got third place you know!?"

Really huh...

Ignoring Lumia, who gleefully clapped her hands, Glen's gaze drifted towards nowhere in particular, and dazed out. Somewhere along his line of sight were Road and Kai, whom had fought bravely against the flying magic experts, and exchanged a high-five in the air in celebration

...T-, To think that they would get this far...

That said, if one thought through it calmly, it could be said that this was an expected result.

The flying magic was performed using a specialized flight-assist magic tool that the players carried on them. Although there was a time where magic was cast using a broom-shaped magic tool that control airflow, it was now mainstream to use a ring-shaped magic tool that controlled gravity, which was activated using the black magic [Levitate · Fly].

The competition that utilized this flight magic was aptly named 'Flight Contest'. This time around 'Flight Contest' was held on a 5 kilometer course on the academy grounds, and the two-man team would relay-race for a total of twenty laps. If the race was just one lap, then explosive flying speed would've been the key to winning. However, since the race was twenty laps, the exhaustion of magic power and stamina turned the race into battle of endurance. Originally, flight magic – which was hard to sustain and control – required sharp concentration to perform. In order to achieve great results under these circumstances, players would have to practice the course countless times beforehand, and create a strict racing-pace to adhere to.

Compared to someone who practiced this event exclusively, someone who was practicing for multiple events or couldn't find time to practice would definitely find themselves at a disadvantage in terms of experience and precision with pace-

planning.

In reality, Road and Kai were fundamentally at a disadvantage compared to their opponents, and had fallen to last place in the first half. However, in the second half, all the unpracticed players from the other class, as a result of having vigorously fought for first-place, began to lose speed due to incompetent pacing, and led to their own demise. There was even a case where someone dropped out mid-way due to the exhaustion of magic power. It was probably a disaster caused by the player's experience with the short-distance 'Flight Contest' from last year.

Due to the accumulation of various circumstances, class two managed to take advantage of the power-struggle between other classes, and achieve excellent results.

No, well, if I remember correctly, I did say 'It's impossible to raise your flying speed in a week, so let's practice pacing exclusively' or something like that...

But he hadn't thought that it would work this well.

"This is a good omen isn't it, sensei!"

The blood rushed to Sistina head as she excitedly spoke to Glen.

"When I heard that you told them to ignore flying speed and only focus on pacing, I was wondering what the heck you were doing... but could it be that this was all part of your plan?"

"...O-, Of course."

In any case, if Sistina, who was usually like an annoying sister-in-law, had shown such feelings of admiration, then he had no choice but to reply in such a way.

"The reason I did this was because I'd already grasped the widespread knowledge regarding 'Flying Contest'... Well in any case, the 'Flying Contest' this time around is using the spell [Levitate · Fly], in a 5-kilometer, 2 man, twenty-lap relay race. If it was only once then explosive flying speed would be even more important, but—"

All in all, Glen finally managed to notice the trap that had been laid for this event, and he explained it to everyone else as though he had known it since the beginning. Though, it was not like his social standing could really get any worse.

“—So basically all we needed to was wait for the people who didn’t pace to destroy themselves you see? That’s why, as a matter of fact, my instruction was actually pretty simple. ‘Abide by the set pacing even if it kills you’ right? ... Fu-, easy does it when it comes to leadership huh?”

With his back leaned against the chair, legs crossed, a calm and composed expression covered by his clasped hands, and an intrepid smile that could be seen in the gaps of his fingers, Glen seemed to look like a grand strategist.

And then, the students who listened to Glen’s post-matter excuse seemed to form a complete misunderstanding. They gazed at Glen with awe and admiration.

“C-, Could it be that we...”

“Ah... I thought that there was no way... but if we have Sensei with us, could we possibly...”

Stop that you guys. Please don’t look at me with gazes filled with such pure and genuine hope. It hurts my conscience.

Then, from alleyway in the spectator stands, the students of class four – who had lost at the eleventh hour – and the students of class two began to squabble.

“...Tch! You just happened to win by chance so don’t get ahead of yourselves...-!”

“It wasn’t chance! This is all part of Glen-sensei’s plan!”

“That’s right that’s right! After all, you’re just dancing in Glen-sensei’s palm!”

“W-, What did you say!? Ku-... curse you class two, talking smack like that-! We’ll take the initiative from class two soon enough, and then we’ll crush you guys! You better prepare yourself-!”

“Try not to let the tables get turned on you again alright!? Cause we have Glen-sensei with us!”

“Ah, as long as we have sensei with us, we won’t lose!”

Stop that you guys. For real, please stop. If you guys keep doing that the hurdle will only keep rising, so please.

Internally, Glen was sweating buckets.

“Uhm... sensei? Your face looks a bit pale you know? Uhm, are you alright?”

"Ah, Lumia... You are the only oasis for my heart..."

“ ? ”
.....

In response to Glen, who seemed to be haggard and exhausted for some unknown reason, Lumia puzzledly tilted her head.

"AH-HAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHAHA"

The academy's magic professor, Serika, had been given the honor of seating in the Empress' stand. However, due to the unexpected conclusion of 'Flight Contest', she completely forgot that she was in the presence of the Empress, and began to laugh hysterically while slapping her knees. If this had been any other situation, it would have been considered a vulgar act where it wouldn't be strange for her to be executed on the spot.

In actuality, the head maid Elenora, who waited behind the Empress, wrinkled her forehead in restrained disapproval. On the other hand, the commander of the royal guard Zeros, who was vigilantly guarding the V.I.P. area, viciously glared at Serika.

However, to the greatest female magician on the continent who always went about her way uninhibited and self-centeredly, this hardly mattered.

“That’s improper of you, Serika-kun. You are in the presence of her majesty you know? Is laughing like that not disrespectful?”

The academy's headmaster Rick, who also sat in the V.I.P. stands, released a sigh and reproached Serika.

"Ah-, no, sorry sorry. My bad, highness. Forgive me alright?"

However, Serika didn't seem to have reflected in the least



“Serika-sama, even for you, speaking to her highness in that sort of manner is rather...”

Unable to turn a blind eye to this, Elenora presented her honest opinion, but—

“It’s fine, Elenora.”

The Empress — Alicia didn’t seem to mind Serika’s outrageous behavior; rather, she showed a gentle smile.

“She and I are old friends, and she has taken great care of me since I was a child. Furthermore, this time around, I’m not visiting as the Empress of the Alzano Empire, but rather, as a decorated citizen of the Empire, Alicia, who is here to bear witness to the young ones who will support the future of this empire. There’s no need to be so strict alright?”

“That may be so your highness, but this concerns the dignity of our academy you see...”

“You received me not with a welcoming ceremony for a national guest of honor, but rather as a V.I.P. right? I mean, for today, I am not a prominent figure that you have no choice but to treat with formal respect alright?”

“N-, No, but your venerable... mmph...”

Rick worriedly pressed on his temples.

“You seem to be having fun, Serika.”

“Mhm, I am, Alice.”

Serika replied to Alicia with the pet name from her childhood.

“I was just feeling very relieved. Recently, the Magic Games Festival has all been about gaining power and authority by winning, and this sort of trend was just getting on my nerves. Only sending the students with the highest grades to compete... well what can I say? It’s stupid. Geez, why do they think this is a ‘Festival’? Why can’t they just use their dim-witted brains a little?”

As if she couldn’t hold it any longer, Serika burst into laughter again.

“However, I must say that the instructor named Glen has an eye for strategy.”

“No~~way. That guy probably didn’t think through any~thing at all.”

Serika swiftly replied in the negative.

“Using all forty members of the class and the strategy of putting an emphasis on pacing were all just pure coincidences. Not to mention that those coincidences just happened to turn out well. Why? That’s cause that guy is a completely ordinary person at his core. His only redeeming factor is that he works hard enough.”

Serika continued.

“There’s no doubt that he’s plain and ordinary, that he’s definitely nothing more than ordinary, so why is it that he always manages to pull off something unexpected? Maybe it was because he was born under that star. He was like this since back then, wasn’t he? Your majesty the great Empress.”

Saying that, Serika shot a wink towards Alicia.

Receiving Serika’s words that had some profound meaning behind them, Alicia, as if to choose her words carefully, quietly contemplated for a brief moment—

“Mm, that’s right. Yes, he was this kind of person...”

And showed a nostalgic smile.

After that, Glen’s class’ streak miraculously continued.

The preliminary result of third place from the decidedly average students seem to have an extraordinary effect.

‘Even we can do it, we can fight’. As if embodying the belief that morale was more important than anything, the students of class two continued to rally.

Furthermore, in comparison the top-performers from the other class had to conserve their magic power for the remaining events, the students of Glen’s class could go all out without reserve, and it proved to be an advantage.

Glen himself might not have noticed, but compared to the other instructors who rejected the importance of such a mentality, were obsessed with appearances and formalities, and employed decidedly irrational strategies, Glen, who had once lived a

long military life where there was no certainty towards life or death, appeared to have taken the importance of mentality to heart. Yet, when victory was concerned, Glen would relentlessly employ rational strategies without reserve.

Due to various factors, the differences in ability between Glen's class and the other classes closed.

“Ah, it hit—!? The contestant from class two, Cecil-kun, has managed to strike down a disk from three-hundred meters away with an impressive [Shock · Bolt]—! With this, Cecil-kun has managed to lock down fourth place in ‘Magic Shooter’! What a great upset this issssss—!?”

“I-, I did it... It's just as Glen-sensei said. ‘Don't aim for it directly, but aim for where it will be and wait for it to come’... If it's like this, then...-!”

The average students fought more fiercely than expected...

“Now, the text for the last problem has been projected into the air using magic — This is... Wait, oi oi, could it be that this is — W-, What in the world-!? It's in draconic—!? The draconic problem has come—!? This is quite the nasty problem isn't it!? Even though second-level divine dialect and early-ancient dialect have appeared in this event, this is far beyond that-!? Did the person who designed this problem make this to shut the contestants out!? Now, the contestants from each class have chanted [Read · Language], but this is probably too mu—”

“I got it-!”

“Ohoh!? The first one to find an answer and ring the bell is contestant Wendy from class two! She's been on a roll, but can she do it-!? Could she possibly decode this—!?”

“‘The knights who bear the principle of courage, shall only speak the truth!’ It is a verse from the Mayros' poem is it not!?”

“There it is—!? The fanfare for a correct answer has been played—!? Contestant Wendy has crushed the competition in ‘Decryption’—! She is without a doubt unmatched for first place—!”

“Hmpf, I won't lose when it comes to this field. That being said... ‘When faced with a

divine language problem, don't translate it to the common language immediately, but rather, reword it into the new-ancient language first'... I'd like to thank sensei for this piece of advice..."

The top-students continued to handily top the ranks.

When class two took the field for a competition, the audience would also get riled up.

Rather than watching the teams composed of otherworldly top-students from the other classes, it was easier to get more passionate about watching Glen's class, who hit closer to home.

Although he was the one leading that class, there were also countless positive and negative rumors about the newbie instructor. At any rate, class two became a focal of this second-year Magic Games Festival.

But—

Well... the basic differences are just too big, huh—

At the standby-spectating area for class two; whilst the other students of the class were in celebratory high spirits, Glen silently observed the situation alone.

Glen gazed at the scoreboard that was to one end of the stadium.

As of now, Glen's class placed third out of ten classes. Harry's class was in first place.

Although the difference in point between first and third wasn't large, but it was impossible to deny that his class was trailing further and further away from Harry's.

To be honest, I never thought that they would be able to hang on for this long

Ordinarily, they would have cemented a spot in last place.

You guys have performed admirably. You believed in what I had to say, and you all gave it your best in this past week...

Thinking back, Glen initially held zero interest for the Magic Games Festival. He, despite having once attended this academy, had already forgotten about the entire thing. To add on to that, the passion that he showed for the competition was purely

for money. This was nothing but the pure and unfettered truth.

However, seeing the class united, their merry attitude, their desperate contention for victory, their support for one another, and their passionate appearances—

“—Geez, this makes me wanna win as well... ah, what a pain.”

Without catching anyone’s attention, Glen complained to himself.

But what should I do now? Being able to get this far was just a fluke – well, more like some sort of miracle – but the difference in raw ability is pretty clear...

Although it wasn’t obvious with the way it was going, but as the competitions continued, the differences in raw abilities would start to take its toll, and the scores would most likely begin to pull apart.

The singles-events primarily took place in the morning and the higher point team-events would start from noon onwards. If there was any time for a comeback it would be then. In order to achieve that, morale had to be maintained at the highest.

Glen’s class was currently in third place. Before noon, he hoped to rise by one place.

If that was achieved — then there would be the possibility of an upset in the afternoon.

“If I remember correctly, the next competition is the last one in the morning isn’t it... Erm, what was it again...?”

Glen opened the program itinerary that was at hand.

Staring at it for a short while....

“...I see. In this case, it might actually be possible.”

Glen let slip a crude smile.

During the free time before the last event of the morning half of the Magic Games Festival—

“Hey, sensei...”

Sistina, who seemed to be worried to death, anxiously spoke out to Glen who was sitting next to her.

“Uhm... even though it is a bit late, could you consider switching Lumia with someone else?”

“Huh...?”

‘What the heck are you saying?’ With an expression that screamed such, Glen turned towards Sistina.

“I mean, the event that she’s in...”

Sistina turned her eyes to the central field. There, the students who would be participating for the next event stood on standby. The ten contestants stood evenly apart at their designated positions as if to form a circle. Amongst them, Lumia loitered around with a somewhat nervous expression.

“‘Spirit Defense’... I think such a rigorous event is too much for her...-!”

Sistina’s desperate plea fell on deaf ears.

The event ‘Spirit Defense’. One of the essential skills for magicians would be a method to handle spiritual corruption attacks, and this competition was forged to test that ability. From a general standpoint, this was a competition where the contestants would use the white magic [Mind · Up] to increase their mental strength to resist attacks. Then, slowly but surely, the power of the spiritual corruption attacks would increase. It was an elimination-type test of endurance where the last person with a normal mental state would be the winner.

“Look! The contestants from the other class are all guys aren’t they!? The only girl there is Lumia you know!?”

As Sistina had pointed out, amongst the tough looking male students, Lumia was the lone flower.

“O-, Oi... Look... is she gonna be alright...?”

“To send a girl for this event...”

“Just what is the instructor of that class thinking...?”

Sistina wasn't the only one who sensed a disparity in Lumia's appearance, even the audience seemed to be bewildered.

Could he not read the mood? Or had he?

Although Lumia had gathered a countless number of trouble gazes, she gave a small wave towards her classmates sitting in the stands and gleefully smiled.

“Haha... you're a terrible person, sensei.”

The sarcastic remark that came from behind Glen was accompanied by an equally cynical laugh. Sistina turned her eyes in the voice direction, and found Gibel, who laughed with twisted lips, sitting there.

“You weren't here during the festival last year, so you clearly didn't know. In last year's ‘Spirit Defense’... people entered a coma for three days due to mental collapse came one after another you know? Did you not investigate this at all?”

“.....”

Glen didn't say anything.

“And take a look at the guy standing next to her.”

Gibel pointed towards the student standing to the right of Lumia.

There stood a student with a seemingly overwhelming presence. His un-magician-esque physique was easily two or three times bigger than Lumia. He had red-dyed hair and tanned-black muscles. Combined with his somewhat aggressive look and irritated expression, if he were to run into a girl in the middle of the night, no matter whom they were, they would be practically guaranteed to burst into tears. With the way he wore rings, necklace, piercings, and bracelets, it wouldn't be wrong to say that he was filled to the brim with silver-crafted accessories of which none had any magical effects. To add onto that, his sleeves were rolled up in a manner that laid to bare the tattoo on his shoulder and the muscles of his arms.

If he walked on the street, even the most infamous delinquents would yield and give way. The name of the student with overwhelming presence and pressure was—

“Jaihir from class five is well known as the head of an uncouth organization formed from the second and third sons of collapsed noble and merchant families. He often causes trouble for the police, and is involved in a seemingly endless amount of bad rumors.”

‘Fuu’, Gibel provokingly exhaled from his nose.

“Despite that however, he came out on top in last year’s ‘Spirit Defense’. Not to mention that the difference was so big that no one could even so much as trail behind him you see? Well, even if I didn’t say any of that, you can probably tell that he’s the real deal when it comes to mental strength.”

“T-, That’s true... He sure seems to have a lot of fighting spirit doesn’t he...”

Sistina groaned in understanding. From a general point of view, in an academy that was filled to the brink with intellectual-types, Jaihir’s conspicuousness was practically dazzling.

“Well, him aside, sensei, it’s quite cruel of you to send Lumia out to face him, especially since this is her first time she participating in this event.”

“.....”

“To be honest, most of the classes gave up on the event when they saw that Jaihir was participating in it. Heck, even Harry-sensei’s class made an exception for this event and sent some kind of low-performing weakling. Well, I guess it’s a logical choice in the end. You can only score points if you get first in this event, and it wouldn’t do any good if they sent out their main force just to have them be ruined.”

“.....”

“I had an inkling of what you were up to, but... sensei... are you planning to use her as a sacrificial pawn?”

Hearing Gibel say this, Sistina vigorously turned towards Glen.

Glen’s hands were joined together to prop up his chin, and he leaned his elbows against his knees. In such a manner, Glen remained silent.

“Ah, I see. Although she’s adept at healing-type white magic, she doesn’t have any

particular talents beyond that... I see, so that is what it was. Since there isn't any event that requires the use of healing-type magic, in order to preserve the strength of the rest of the group, it would be logical to use her here..."

"....."

"Haha, my my, you sure do have an eye for strategy don't you sensei? It's to the point where I feel sick in the stomach."

Glen remained silent. For a while now, he had kept his eyes closed and refused to say anything.

That silence... was an eloquent affirmation in itself.

"Sensei... that's a lie, right? There's no way that sensei would do something like this, right...?"

Sistina anxiously called out to Glen.

However, it appeared that Glen had no intention to reply. Although she wanted to believe in Glen, his attitude made it hard for her to do so.

"Sensei, please say something... Sensei... Sensei!"

Sistina impatiently shook Glen.

'Gakun', Glen's body tilted to one side.

"zzz....."

Looking closely, Glen's lips drooled with saliva. At some point in time, he had entered a deep and comfortable sleep.

He hadn't listened to anything they had to say.

For the few bitter seconds that followed, they remained speechless as a collective rage began to encroach upon them.

"You little-, get uppppppppp—!"

“Guhbuwhaaaa—!?”

Sistina’s body blow splendidly connected with Glen’s flank.

“W-, What the heck are you doing you pesky white cat-! I finally managed to enter my energy-saving standby mode!?”

“Shut up! And don’t say such stupid things either-!”

Then, Sistina pointed towards the faraway Lumia and began rattling away.

“More importantly, is what Gibel said true!? Did you really send Lumia into this event to use her as a sacrificial pawn!?”

“Huh...?”

“If it’s true... I won’t ever forgive you for doing this, even if it’s you, sensei...-!”

As her shoulders began to slightly tremble in rage and anxiousness, she stared down Glen.

“...I don’t really get what you’re saying, but...”

Glen tiresomely shook his head, and said.

“Lumia as a sacrificial pawn? ...Hah? Just what the heck are you guys saying?”

“Eh?”

Ahh, I can’t help but feel a little nervous...

During the brief period preceding the event, Lumia looked through her surroundings to kill time.

Looking closely at the spectator stand where her classmates were seated, she could barely make out the familiar view of Sistina hitting Glen in the side. What happened this time?

Sisti’s as dishonest as ever isn’t she...

Lumia smiled to herself as she thought that.

“...Oi, girl over there.”

A feral voice snapped at her.

Lumia turned to face the origin, and was met with Jaihir’s sour expression.

“Don’t get me wrong, but you should give up now.”

“!”

“This event isn’t a tea party; it’s not suitable for a childish girl like you... If you don’t want to lie in a bed and be treated with spiritual cleansing magic, get out of here.”

For any normal girl, his intimidating presence would cause them to reflexively flinch, but in addition to that, he cast a piercing beast-like glance towards Lumia. However—

“Ahaha, erm, if I remember correctly... you are Jaihir-kun from class five right? Are you worried about me? Fufu, how kind of you.”

“...Ah?”

Jaihir was dumbfounded by the unexpected response and felt troubled.

“I’ll be fine. My classmates are also cheering for me as well. So I have to try my best.”

“Tch... ah, that right? Well don’t regret it.”

“Also... Jaihir-kun’s class five is in second place right now right?”

“... Hmpf, it’s meaningless either way. So what about it?”

“My class is currently in third... so if I were to beat you... our ranking will swap wouldn’t it?”

Saying that, Lumia pressed a finger to her lips and mischievously winked.

“...Interesting.”

Jaihir showed a ferocious smile that was akin to a wolf that had found a rabbit for his prey.

To be honest, Jaihir bore no interest for the class' victory or defeat. He didn't really care about whether the Magic Games Festival was held in the first place. The reason he was standing here right now was because of the timid and tumorous pestering of his nasty instructor and his classmates. Since it would be a pain to deal with, he decided that he might as well participate in this.

However, despite everyone fearing to even so much as get close to himself, this weak-looking girl had clearly issued a 'challenge'. The fighting spirit of the smoldered, hungry wolf was ignited.

"Ah-, ah-, broadcast system testing, testing. Eh-, it's about time. The event 'Spirit Defense' will soon commence!"

Hearing the broadcast, the audience rose up in cheers.

"Now then, now then, allow me to introduce this man again this year! Please come forth! Magic professor of the academy, and the authority of spirit-type magic! Of the sixth-rank, Baron Twest!"

With that announcement, a cloud of smoke burst forth from the center of the circle formed by the students. An elegant bearded man who wore a tailcoat and top-hat emerged from the smoke.

"Fu-, how do you do ladies and gentlemen? I am Baron Twest Lu Norwhal."

Using a rather simple transfer magic, the man who made a dramatic entrance gave his greeting.

"Now then, let us quickly begin the event. To what extent will the contestants this year be able to bear the might of my magnificent magic...?"

'Gulp'. The contestants swallowed their saliva.

"Let the first round begin! If you please, Baron Twest!"

"Now then, as is custom, let us begin with a mild [Sleep · Sound] shall we...? Here I go!"

Like this, the event ‘Spirit Defense’ began.

”

Twist chanted the white magic [Sleep · Sound].

”

At the same time, the students chanted a spell to resist: the white magic [Mind · Up].

Immediately after the students completed their chants, Twist dispersed the magic towards the ten students surrounding him with equal force. A sound akin to a tuning fork being struck enveloped the surroundings.

As the spell’s force began to disperse—

“H-, He fell asleep—!? The first one to drop out is from class one, Harry-sensei’s classsss—!?”

Looking at the students that lay fast asleep on the ground, the audience couldn’t hold back their laughter.

“Hey, he’s totally a sacrificial pawn isn’t he—!? Isn’t this a bit too lazy of you Harry-sensei-!?”

“Mhm, but I would’ve liked for him to last a little longer if possible...”

“Well, the dominator of last year’s event, Jaihir from class five is here I suppose—, so I’m sure that it’s just a strategy to conserve the main forces’ energy. Well, his victory is practically set in stone, so going at this in a rough manner won’t bring any results. Anyway, as a commentator, I would like to see how far the single flower from class two, Lumia-chan, will get... This is quite a highlight is it not, Baron?”

“Fu, I suppose so. Just how long will this pitiable girl last against my spirit-control magic? Just how will the innocent and tender heart of this young girl be corrupted? I’m quite looking forward to it... Fuhe, fuhehe...”

Showing a smile that failed to hide his ill intentions, the Baron cast a glance at Lumia.

Even Lumia of all people began to break into a cold sweat, and she took a step back.

“Woah... the Baron just cast a grand reveal of his unpleasant fetish didn’t he... Rather Baron, were you always such a perverted person?”

“What are you saying? I am obviously not a pervert-! It’s just that whenever I see a young girl that is in an absent-minded stupor, experiencing an ill of heart, in a state of frantic disorder, or in the midst of developing an intense fright; I merely feel a soul-striking excitement-! That is all!”

“PERVERTTTTTTTTT———!?”

‘I think I’ll dismiss him’. Without a hint of knowledge that the headmaster Rick had already decided such, the Baron continued throw out his spirit-control magic of increasing potency one after another. In return, the students desperately chanted [Mind · Up] to resist the effects. Each round steadily proceeded.

“Baron Twest has decided to use the white magic [Confusion · Mind]—! Woah, this might be bad! The contestant from class eight wasn’t able to endure iiiiit—!”

"Ababababababababababa... Hot! Hot!"

“GYAAAAA—!?! Hey you! I’m not happy in the slightest that you boys are stripping alright!?! Either way, it should be Lumia-kun who—”

“Oi, stop! Try to keep your desire under wraps a little you idiot Baron! Rescue team, hurry up and bring class eight’s contestant away! Purify his mind! Purify his mind quickly!”

“Next up is the white magic [Marionette · Dance]! It will turn everyone into my puppets! Now, dance!”

“Puh! Da-hahaha—!? The contestant from class ten has begun to dance—! Rather, don’t make the men do such a sexy dance you idiot Baron! It’s creepy you know-!?”

“..Tch”

“Tch? Baron, why exactly are you clicking your tongue at Lumia-chan!? Stop messing around already you dirty perverted old man!”

The spirit-corruption magic swept through the stage like a tempest. It appeared that this year again, ‘Spirit Defense’ would eventually unfold into a hellish pandemonium.

However, compared to the heated battle on the field, the spectators initially yielded a cold reception. That was because the event was plain and simple from an onlooker’s perspective. On top of that, it wasn’t too hard to guess who would come out on top.

Jaihir from class five would win. That was the blatantly clear prediction to make. As of now, in spite of the ever-increasing fore of the spirit-corruption magic, Jaihir had yet to budge. He merely plainly faced forwards with a cold gaze.

“B-, Baron... I’ve actually been in love with you since forever, and you know...”

“GYAAA—!? NOOOO—!? T-, The rashessss—!”

“W-, What a degenerate—!? The Baron has set his mind on using a full power [Charm · Mind]! But it backfired on him completelyyyy—! Rather, can someone, someone, do something about this perverted criminal deviant of a noble! Rescue team, hurry up and purify the contestant’s mind! While you’re at it, do the same for the Baron if you please! Hurry!”

“Allow me to now use the white magic [Phantasmal · Force] to make you bear witness to some indescribable and blasphemous illusions! Tremble before my fascinating and universal menace!”

“aAAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH—!? NOOOOOOOOOOOOO—!?”

“UWAHHHHHHH—!? Stop—! Anything but that—!”

“Ah, in the mirror!? In the mirror—!”

“The contestants have lost their sanity and entered a state of disarray! Hey, isn’t this too much, Baron!? Rescue team, purify their minds as quickly as you can! Rather, I think this every year, but why isn’t this event banned!?”

However, as the rounds continued to proceed, the spectators steadily entered a state of noisy commotion.

It was because Lumia from class two, who the audience expected to be immediately eliminated from this rigorous event, was still standing on the stage. To add onto that,

whilst the other contestants tore their hair and bit their nails in a desperate struggle, she remained completely calm and composed, exactly like Jaihir who stood next to her.

Huh? Could it be that... No way...

The doubts of the spectating students steadily grew—

And that soon changed into a renewed sense of anticipation—

“Class nine has been eliminated—!? What in the world, who would’ve expected such a development—!? With this, the event is now a one-on-one between Jaihir-kun from class five and Lumia-chan from class two—!”

At some point in time, the unexpected developments caused a rush of excitement to surge through the audience, whom were now cheering loudly.

“N-, No way...”

Observing Lumia from the spectator stand, Sistina was dumbstruck.

“To think that... she was this strong... at this....”

Despite displaying a cool and cold attitude on a regular basis, Gibel was unable to hide his discomfort.

And to those two, Glen tiresomely said.

“The white magic [Mind · Up] is a spell that enhances one’s mental fortitude, so for someone who already possesses an exceptional amount of mental mastery... Well basically, the spell has an amplified effect on people who already have nerves of steel. That being said, there’s no one in our class who has mental strength equal to Lumia.

“She has...?”

”Mhm”. Glen nodded.

“If we were to compare her resolve to that of a normal person, then hers would definitely be in an entirely different dimension. It’s like she always possesses the readiness to die at any moment so to speak... In some sense, she’s an abnormal kind of person. If we were to compare mental tenacity alone, then there’s no one who can

match up to Lumia.”

“A-, And that’s why you had her participate in this event...?”

The terrorist event from one month ago suddenly flashed through Sistina’s mind. Thinking about it, Lumia hadn’t yielded a single step to the vile magicians of that terrorist organization, and stood with firm resolution in the face of adversity. She did so in spite of the fact that she would possibly be killed if she ever made the slightest mistake.

“But well, how should I say this... That Jaihir guy is pretty much the same deal. Just what kind of carnage has he experienced? That guy...”

Glen looked in awe towards Jaihir, who matched Lumia step-for-step thus far.

“I thought that this would be an easy win if I left it to Lumia, but I guess it can’t be helped. If it comes to that then...”

Sitting beside Sistina, who was rooting for her close friend, Glen formed a silent resolve.

Meanwhile, on the field, the Baron was feeling uneasy towards the unexpected developments.

“Hm, what is this... To think that not only Jaihir-kun, but even Lumia-kun would be able to persevere through all this... To be frank, even I am astounded... Tch.”

“...Hey Baron, why is it that you seem slightly frustrated?”

“Now then, It’s about time to use the white magic [Mind · Break] I suppose.”

Magnificently ignoring the ongoing commentary, Baron Twest announced the next spell.

“It’s finally come down to this! From the twenty-seventh round onward, He will be using [Mind · Break]—! This spell will temporarily strip one of all ability to think and reason, and is amongst the most dangerous spells of the spirit-control branch of white magic! It is a terrifying spell which if not carefully used will instantaneously turn its target into a vegetable—!”

“In any case, I don’t plan on taking my chant to that extent. I’ll keep it to the level where they’ll be in a coma for about three days or so! Should Lumia-kun fall, please leave her treatment and care all to me!”

“...What about Jaihir-kun?”

“—Now let’s begin!”

Then, Baron Twest solemnly chanted [Mind · Break].

In response, Lumia and Jaihir chanted [Mind · Up].

When the Baron activated the spell, a loud clang reverberated through the surroundings...

“Hmpf, are you two alright? If you are then please say some—”

“...Tch, this ain’t much.”

“—Yes, I’m fine.”

The two of them replied immediately, their eyes clear and firm.

“What’s this? They were even able to endure [Mind · Break]—!? Amazing! These two are truly amazing—!?”

In response to the heated development, the crowd’s blood boiled in excitement.

Amidst the flooding applause and the tempest of claps, Jaihir spoke to Lumia.

“Hmpf. You... for a girl you sure have some guts. Even amongst the guys and scoundrels that I know, there aren’t many who have a fighting spirit that’s comparable to yours.”

“I-, Is that so?”

“Hmm? But you’re almost at your limit aren’t you? You’re sweating you know?”

“A-, Ahaha... you can tell? Mhm, it’s true that this is quite hard for me... and I felt dizzy there for a moment...”

“You wanna give up now? You won’t like to fall into a three-day coma would you?”

“Thanks for worrying, Jaihir-kun, but... no. I can’t afford to lose here.”

Lumia showed a stout-hearted smile. Regardless of who looked at it, one could feel a strong sense of perseverance.

‘My oh my’. Jaihir could only shrug his shoulders.

“Hah... I don’t get it. Be it this person or that person, everyone is obsessed with stuff like appearances and fame, just like the entirety of this pointless Magic Games Festival... So why exactly do you have to go this far?”

“Sensei said that ‘We will win with everyone’. That ‘it’s all for one, and one for all.’”

“Sensei? Ah, that rumored idiot instructor huh? Hmpf, I really don’t get it. Just where are you getting that stupid sense of obligation from...”

“It’s fun.”

Jaihir was silenced by Lumia’s frank response.

“Working together with everyone united towards one goal is very fun you know? Jaihir-kun, it’s because of sensei that I was able to experience this feeling for the first time. So I have to try my best as well.”

“.....Hmpf, that so?”

After that, Jaihir didn’t say anything more to Lumia. He had nothing to say towards a worthy opponent who bore firm beliefs. That’s probably what it was.”

“Now then, coming next! The twenty-eighth round—!”

Finally, the event was entering its climax. The spectators were getting more and more fired up.

The excitement that flowed through the stadium was so heated that there was no telling if it would ever dissipate.

“Now then... I shall increase the potency of [Mind · Break] just a little bit more. Are

you two ready!? Here I come!”

Baron Twest carefully adjusted the force of the spell, and began his chant.

As the two, three-layered spell was being formed, Lumia and Jaihir chanted [Mind · Up] to resist [Mind · Break] once more.

The twenty-ninth round followed shortly, as did the thirtieth round.

The number of close-calls steadily increased—

Finally — in the thirty-first round, the stalemate began to crumble.

“Ahh— Ohh!? Lumia-chan has staggered—!?”

Compared to the first instance of [Mind · Break], the stupefying metallic ring was remarkably sharper, and as it rung through the stadium—

It would appear that it had penetrated the defenses of [Mind · Up].

Accompanied by violent shaking, Lumia’s body tilted to one side.

“...!”

Her balance now lost, Lumia fell to her knees, and speechlessly faced the ground.

“On the other hand, Jaihir-kun is still standing firm! I-, It’s seems that the winner has been decided—!”

“Are you fine...? Do you give up?”

“.....No.”

It seems that her consciousness was a bit faint.

After her delayed response, Lumia rose her head with renewed conviction, and rose to her feet.

“...I’m fine. I can still do this!”

Her eyes burned with spirit as she spoke these powerful and reassuring words.

“What’s this—!? She has chosen to continue—!? It seems that this is still anyone’s game—!”

The announcement caused the spectators to rise in cheers. With the lone girl choosing to fight fiercely to the bitter end, the tension of the stadium was at its peak. At this point, everyone wanted to see it – The scene of the frail girl overcoming the seemingly indomitable man.

The stadium whirled in anticipation, and as if to reply to that, the voice of the announcer rose ever more—

Now then! Let us vigorously continue! The thirty-second—”

“We withdraw!”

Suddenly, a loud shout enveloped the stadium. As if throwing a cold bucket over the heated stadium, the spectators grew silent.

“...Eh? Sensei?”

Hearing that, Lumia turned towards the origin of the voice.

There stood Glen, who had climbed onto the field at some point in time.

“U-, Uh? What did you say? Glen-sensei from class two...”

“We withdraw. Withdraw. Class two will withdraw from this event after clearing the thirty-first found. Don’t make me say it again.”

A wave of solemnity swept through the stadium.

“W-, What’s this... Lumia-chan from class two, will withdraw... What an abrupt end to this event...”

In the moment following the announcers regretful murmurs—

Are you kidding me? Just let them see it through to the end, you idiot instructor!

The tempest of 'boo's sprung forth from the stands.

However, without a care for the escalating situation, Glen placed a hand on Lumia's head, and consoled her, who was still in an absent-minded stupor due to the abrupt end of the competition.

"You did well, Lumia."

Returning to her senses immediately, Lumia protested Glen's decision.

"N-, No way sensei! I can still..."

"No-o, this is enough. You should know better than anyone that you're already at your limit right? You won't last through the next round."

"...T-, That is... uhm..."

It seems that it was right on the mark. Lumia could only lower her head.

"But, to win... If I don't win here..."

"Well it's regrettable, but when all's said and done, I'd rather not have you do something that'll leave you in a coma for three days. My, you really did well... but your opponent was too much."

Glen closed his eyes apologetically.

Then, he cast a glance towards Jaihir, who remained in his imposing stance.

"I thought that you would surely win without any trouble, but that monster was completely beyond my expectations. It must've really hard on you... sorry about this, really."

In response, Lumia showed a smile and lightly shook her head.

"No. It really wasn't, sensei. I had a lot of fun you know? It's a shame that I lost in the end, but... that's because I wanted to fight for my own and everyone's sake."

"...That so?"

Leaving the two aside, the announcer moved onto the live interview. It seems that he was desperate to draw the spectator's minds off booing.

“Er—, now then, a word with the now two-time winner of ‘Spirit Defense’, the representative of class five, Jaihir kun.”

“Fu-, truly well done, Jaihir-kun... Hm?...Jaihir-kun?”

Thinking there was something strange about Jaihir's complete lack of movement or speech from beginning to end, Baron Twest took a closer look at Jaihir's expression. The hue of the Baron's face changed in an instant.

“Oh? Is something the matter, Baron?”

“J-, Jaihir-kun has already...”

“Eh? Did something happen to him?”

“H-, He might be standing, but he's unconscious—”

“.....Huh?”

The boos that gushed forth like a tempest towards Glen from the stadium were silenced.

“Erm, that means that...”

“Lumia-kun wins right? Because even though she withdrew, compared to Jaihir-kun who had failed to get past the thirty-first round, Lumia-kun had somehow managed to get through.

Within a few moments—

“...W-, What's thisssss—!? What a turn of events! The winner of this event is the lone flower amongst the contestants, Lumia-chan from class two—!”

The stadium burst into cheers.

“...S-, Sensei?”

“...For real?”

In response to the sudden events, Lumia and Glen’s eyes seemed to go blank in disbelief.

“You did it! You really did it, Lumia!”

“Kya-!?”

A bear hug enveloped Lumia from behind.

“Sisti?”

“Geez, don’t push yourself so hard! I told you that if you can’t take anymore then be mature and withdraw didn’t I you stubborn girl!? ...But, congratulations, and I’m glad you’re safe.”

Taking a closer look, the students from class two jumped from their seats and rushed directly towards Lumia. Surrounding her, the students began to praise her for her valiant efforts.

Seemingly overwhelmed, Lumia cast a glance towards Glen, who observed the situation unfold from faraway.

Glen replied by bending his lips into a smile and shrugging his shoulders.

Lumia nodded once, and turned to face her classmates once again—

“Thank you, everyone!”

She released an ecstatic smile—

An unclouded and griefless smile that was akin to a flower—

“.....Feeling relieved now? Alice.”

Serika spoke out to Alicia, who had observed Lumia’s display with such intensity that it seemed like she would devour the scene in its entirety.

“...! ...Yes.”

Alicia, remembering that Serika and Rick, who were in charge of her reception, had learned the top-secret truth of Lumia's identity in the aftermath of the incident a month prior, nodded her head.

"That girl is blessed with a good teacher and good friends. Being able to see her with such a smile with my own two eyes... it feels great."

"Geez, if you really love her that much as a mother, then why didn't you say anything to me? I could've done something about it..."

"That is..."

"Please don't say such overbearing things, Serika-kun. I'm sure that even the Empress has certain circumstances."

Rick butted into the conversation as if to rebuke Serika.

"I get it you know? It's a danger to the authority and legitimate rule of the royal family right? ...I just feel sick hearing that a mother and daughter have no choice but to separate due to such a pointless reason."

"...You might be right. I'm... unqualified to be a mother."

Alicia lowered her head with a regretful expression.

"I wasn't trying to but the blame on you alright Alice? To be honest, you went through a lot of trouble in order to save that girl didn't you? In order to make it look like she succumbed to sickness you did a crazy amount of work, not to mention that there were a lot of arrangements to make regarding her adoption... Also, I heard from that guy about this, but—"

"It's fine... It's fine."

Alicia placed a finger over her lips in a 'Shh~' gesture, and showed a smile.

"No matter how many things I did under wraps, it doesn't change the fact that I abandoned that girl for the sake of the empire's dignity..."

Hearing Alicia say that, Serika didn't say anything more.

“I’m very satisfied today. Having worried for so long, I was finally able to see her in good spirits, even if I could only look upon her from faraway. From here on out, I probably won’t get another chance to see her again will I? ...I’m sure I will be fine with it.”

“.....”

“I can only pray for her happiness in the future. I feel like this is a great burden that has been taken off my chest. Fufu, from tomorrow onwards I’ll be able to perform my governing duties without concern.”

“.....”

“Ah, if there’s one thing I can ask for, I want to see her when she becomes a bride... I probably won’t be able to though. It won’t do for the Empress to attend a normal citizen’s wedding ceremony after all.”

“.....”

“Ah, right, speaking of marriage.... When Glen intervened in the competition, wasn’t the way she looked at Glen a little strange? Could it be, that that girl is... fufufu.”

As though she had already accepted everything, Alicia continued to monologue.

“...Are you fine with this? Alice.”

Serika struck the core of the problem directly.

“...Eh?”

“Merely looking from faraway, without having a single conversation... Are you really fine with this?”

“That is... But, I can’t do that...”

“Geez, really now, who do you think I am?”

Serika shrugged her shoulders in an ‘oh dear’ manner.

“I am the famed seventh-rank magician of the northern continent, Serika Alfornea you

know? I am all-knowing and omnipotent – well not really, but there are many things I can do alright? For example, I can fool the eyes of the royal guards to give a separated mother and daughter a chance to meet, or something like that.

“...Serika.”

“So, what are you gonna do? Alice. Do you want to meet your daughter? Or would you rather not?”

Hearing Serika’s temptations, Alicia was at a loss for what to do.

“Just for today, for this short moment, why don’t you be more honest with yourself, your Highness?”

Unexpectedly, the one who pushed Alicia’s lost ship to port was Elenora, who had quietly listened to the exchange from beginning to end.

“Elenora?”

For a brief moment, Alicia eyes widened in surprise. Alicia never thought that Elenora, who had vigilantly kept the locket for safekeeping, of all people would say that.

“It will be fine. Serika-sama is the leading magician of the continent. I’m sure that nothing bad will happen.”

“Come on now, even your servant is saying that you know?”

Serika smiled mischievously as things turned out as she wanted.

Witnessing Serika’s overbearing and high-handed methods, headmaster Rick showed a secret, wry smile.

CHAPTER 3

AN ENCOUNTER BETWEEN EMPRESS AND PRINCESS

At the Magic Games Festival stadium bustling with activity, in a corner leading to the spectator stands—

Standing there were a strange boy-girl duo who wore matching black-themed suits and overcoats.

One was a young male who appeared to be around twenty years old. Beneath his indigo-tinted black hair were a pair of hawk-like sharp eyes. His tall, slender, and well-proportioned body appeared to be rather emaciated, but it was definitely stout. As for his general demeanor, rather than merely calling it calm, it would be more accurate to say that he gave off a marked air of cool indifference. It was as though a knife so sharp that it was fatal-on-contact was hidden somewhere – That was the kind of impression he exuded.

The other was a young girl that was in her mid-teens. Her disheveled blue hair flowed freely with the single exception of a knot behind the nape, and her azure-colored eyes gave the impression that she was constantly sleepy. Her small, delicate, yet lavish figure reminded one of an antique doll. It would most certainly be charming if she were to smile, but nothing remotely close to an expression could be found. It was impossible to read any traces of emotion.

The coats that the two wore were decorated with metal plates and rivets, which were reinforced with runes that were engraved upon them. It was clear that these were robes used for magic battles.

In the bustling crowd of students and spectators alike, the two were rather conspicuous. Their outfits were of course a factor, but they also seemed to have a rather unscrupulous presence.

However, the two didn't seem to draw any suspecting glances. As though they were pebbles on the roadside, it was hard to notice that they were there.

“–That’s Glen, right?”

The young man murmured impassionately.

“...Mm, it must be Glen.”

The young girl replied emotionlessly.

Their gazes were focused on the field where the event ‘Spirit Defense’ had just taken place. Specifically, they were focused on Glen, who stood between and conversed with the blonde and silver-haired girls.

“He left without telling us anything... but to think he’d end up here.”

The young man’s gaze looked as though he was a raptor that had spotted his prey. The girl beside him speechlessly moved towards the central field, towards where Glen was.

“Wait.”

With a threatening voice, the man reached out and grabbed the girl’s hair.

With a jerk, the girl pulled backwards into an incline.

“...What are you doing, Albert?”

The girl flatly asked the man.

“That’s what I should be saying. What are you planning to do, Riel?”

Maintaining his threatening glance, the man rebutted.

Immediately, the girl called Riel replied, as if the answer was already obvious.

“It’s obvious... I’m going to settle the score with Glen.”

Immediately, the young man – Albert – pulled on Riel’s hair.

“Ow. Why are you pulling on my hair?”

Contrary to what she said, Riel spoke with a calm demeanor, as though the action

hadn't hurt at all.

"Don't cause unnecessary trouble. Have you forgotten our mission?"

"Mission?"

Riel considered the question briefly.

"...To settle the score with Glen?"

"....."

Albert, whose grim expression was not fazed in the least by her answer, decided to say nothing more. The two had a brief moment of silence.

"... This time, we have been assigned two missions. One of them is to monitor the movements of the Empress royal guard."

"Why? They're our allies."

"We are not one cohesive body. There is royal bloodline faction, the royal collateral-bloodline faction, the anti-royals, the right-wing radicals, the conservative-feudalists, the Macbeth-progressivist left-wing, the imperial church right-wing... not the mention the noble-born and the common-blood factions... Simply put, the Alzano Empire is a den of chaos occupied by various factions holding their own beliefs and political agenda.

"I don't get it, but okay."

"Of course."

Again, the two had a brief moment of silence.

"The head of the right-wing faction, the royal guard, have recently received some troubling intel. It was made especially clear when they introduced a new policy during the round-table conference regarding the treatment of supernaturals."

"Why?"

"Generally, the people view supernaturals as the reincarnation of a devil.

Furthermore, the law was proposed by the Empress herself. Simply put, if supernaturals were to be protected in the Empress' name, it would damage the authority of the supposedly holy royal family."

"I don't get it, but okay."

"Of course."

Once again, the two had a brief moment of silence.

"So, that's why we're monitoring the royal guard. Although the chances are slim, it still remains a possibility that they will take advantage of the Empress' visit to the academy to put some plan into action. If such an event occurs, then a conflict between the upper-factions of the government is probable."

"I see. I get it now."

Riel nodded her head.

"Basically, I have no choice but to settle the score with Glen... right?"

"....."

Albert, whose grim expression was not fazed in the least by her answer, decided to say nothing more. Again, the two had a brief moment of silence.

"...Mm, I will do my best."

"Don't."

As Riel gestured to move, Albert once again pulled mercilessly on her hair.



“Does Albert not want to meet Glen?”

Having been stopped once again, Riel calmly asked.

“...That goes without saying, there are many things I want to say to that man.”

Albeit a slip-of-the-tongue, a trace amount of irritation and anger could be felt behind Albert’s words.

“Okay. then I will go hit Glen. Albert can go tell Glen what you have to say.”

“Did I not tell you to wait? It’s better if we don’t meet him.”

“Why?”

“Having not seen him for awhile, it feels like the world he’s living in is... It is different from the blood-stained darkness of ours.”

The two turned their eyes to the stage once again. For whatever reason, Glen prostrated himself at the silver-haired girl’s feet. It appeared that the blonde-haired girl tried to say something to smooth things over.

“That guy belongs over there. In a world that shines with light, Glen will surely be able to live his life to the fullest.”

“Beneath a girl’s feet? That’s strange.”

“.....”

Albert, whose grim expression was not fazed in the least by her answer, decided to say nothing more. Once again, the two had a brief moment of silence.

“...?”

Looking at Albert, Riel slightly tilted her head.

In the end, odd silence continued.

The Magic Games Festival was split into morning and afternoon sessions. Between the sessions was a one hour break. The students split into three groups – those who would eat at the cafeteria, those who would eat at the food stalls nearby, and those who had prepared their own lunchboxes – and went their separate ways.

Glen's class was no exception.

“Hah–... Now then.... What should I do...?”

An extremely haggard Glen murmured to himself, as though on the verge of giving up entirely.

He was hungry, if not plain-starved. In all seriousness, it was starting to feel like his stomach was stuck to his back.

Several of Glen's students, as if showing off, opened their boxed lunches and began to dig in. Staying would probably be too much for his mind to handle.

Either way, no money meant no food. Helpless, Glen rose from his seat to begin his tactical retreat from this area filled with alluring aromas. Today again, he would go seek his ration of shroty tree branches.

“U-, Um... Sensei...?”

Turning his head in response to the sudden call, Glen saw a small-statured girl that had the presence of a small animal. She was one of Glen's students, Rin.

“...What's up, Rin?”

“U-, Uhn... I have something I want to... talk to you about... and...”

“Talk to me about?”

Glen looked through his surroundings while scratching his head.

“...Is it something you can't talk to me about right here?”

“Eh? Erm, yes... If possible, I'd like to talk about this somewhere with less people around...”

To be honest, this was a painful situation for Glen. The little energy that remained in his mind was extremely precious.

However, looking at Rin's teary eyes, even the world-class douchebag Glen couldn't find it in himself to refuse.

"...Alright, let's go somewhere else then."

Glen led Rin to the academy's courtyard behind the stadium.

The verdant green grass, the well-kept trees, the multicolored array of grass, all of this had become a familiar sight.

Usually, there would be a lot of students eating lunch here, but due to the Magic Games Festival, a majority of the students ate at the stadium. Thus, the courtyard was peaceful and quiet.

"So? What did you want to talk to me about? If it's not about money, I'm willing to listen."

"U-, Uhm..."

Rin briefly collected her thoughts, and nervously uttered.

"U-, Uhm, I've been entrusted with the 'Transform' event... but I'm not confident I can do well."

"...Huh?"

"I've been giving it my all to practice transformation magic... but it's already today and I'm still nervous... I really don't think I can do this... So I was hoping you could switch me out for someone else..."

"....."

"S-, Since everyone in our class is finally working together and doing what they can to win... I'll feel sorry if I end up holding them back... So... Uhm... Have someone else take my place... please...-!"

With trembling shoulders and teary eyes, Rin pleaded Glen.

Glen scratched his head a few times and sighed.

“...Are you alright with this? You really don’t want to participate?”

“T-, That’s...”

“Please be clear, otherwise I can’t really make a decision”

For a brief moment, Rin remained silent, recollecting her thoughts and clearing her mind. Then–

“To be honest... I really want to... but... I don’t want to trouble everyone else...”

“Then it’s decided.”

Glen placed his hand on Rin’s head.

“Go and do it. There won’t be any problems.”

“Eh!? B-, But if I do this event, I’ll just be troubling every–”

“Hey, the Magic Games Festival is a ‘Festival’ you know. How can you be holding someone else back in a festival?”

“But everyone is fired up to win... even you said that Sensei...”

“...Ah-, I see. That was just to get you guys worked up...”

Glen began to slightly regret his own carelessness.

“Actually, I had some personal reasons to say that you see? Well, either way, that doesn’t really matter anymore. What’s most important is that you guys are happy. It’d be amazing if we can win on top of that, but don’t let it bother you alright?”

“...So... it’s like that?”

“Yeah, so instead of worrying about holding others back, just go out there and have fun. You really like transformation magic right?”

“Y-, Yes... I’ve... always been a bit timid and indecisive... but when it comes to

transformation magic, uhm... It makes me feel like I can become someone different..."

"Then it's fine isn't it?"

Despite Glen's counseling, it seems that Rin was still uneasy.

"...Well then, why don't we have a take a little time for a special lecture?"

On a whim, Glen decided to meddle further into Rin's affairs.

Surprised by Glen's suggestion, Rin rose her head to face Glen.

"...Special... lecture?"

"Mhm. Well Rin, let's start with a bit of review. Transformation magic is split into two types, [Self · Polymorph] and [Self · Illusion]. Do you know the difference between the two?"

After briefly considering the question, Rin replied.

"E-, Erm... [Self · Polymorph] is white magic, whilst [Self · Illusion] is black magic."

"Hahaha, that'll only get you 60 points."

"I-, I'm sorry... E-, Eh... U-, Um... [Self · Polymorph]... Uhm, is a transfiguration magic that restructures the body... and [Self · Illusion] is a illusion magic that controls light to give the impression of a transformation."

When Glen rejected her answer, Rin hurried to correct herself.

"Well, that's about right. [Self · Polymorph] is white magic which controls the mind and body, whilst [Self · Illusion] is black magic which controls movement and energy."

Glen rolled up his right sleeve, and chanted a three-stage spell.

Immediately, his right arm began to change. The muscles became more pronounced, rough black fur began to grow, and his nails began to extend... In the blink of an eye, his arm became the front leg of a wolf.

"The effects of [Self · Polymorph] are decided by its formulation. If you want to

transform into a wolf, then you would use corresponding chant for [Self · Polymorph]. If you want to transform into a dragon, again, you would use corresponding chant for [Self · Polymorph]. To add onto that, although there's a risk of being unable to return to your original state, you can get the abilities of what you've transformed into. If you transform into a horse, then you would have the swiftness of a horse. If you transform into a dragon, then you would be able to breathe fire."

Glen chanted the spell again, and his arm returned to its original state.

"On the other hand, [Self · Illusion] isn't able to go to that extent. All it does is manipulate light to make it appear that way. Regardless of whether you transform into a horse or a bird, you wouldn't be able to run fast or fly. In this case, as far as raw transformation magic goes [Self · Polymorph] is better... but you can't say that for every case. Erm, right... for example..."

Glen pressed a finger against his temple, and chanted [Self · Illusion].

Then, the area around Glen began to blur... and his visage began to lose focus... When he reformed and came into focus again—

"L-, Lumia...-!?"

The figure that appeared was not Glen, but rather Lumia who had her arms crossed and showed a triumphant smile. It didn't seem like an illusion at all, as though the Lumia standing there was the real deal.

"Well, it's something like this."

Even the voice was Lumia's. It would seem that the wavelength and frequency of the voice had been manipulated to achieve this effect.

"Unlike [Self · Polymorph] which requires an exact chant to achieve the transformation, [Self · Illusion] only requires that the user have a clear image of what they want to transform into. Basically, as long as you can imagine it, you can transform into anything you'd like, albeit only on a surface level."

Maintaining Lumia's appearance and voice, Glen explained the concepts in a plain and simple manner.

"In conclusion, if you can't transform into what you like using [Self · Illusion], it means

that you still don't have a clear image of what you want to transform into. On the flipside, as long as you have a clear image, I can guarantee with my life that you'll be able to get it done."

Saying that, Glen, still in Lumia's appearance, showed a bold smile.

"So Rin, you're planning to use [Self · Illusion] during the 'Transform' competition right? What are you gonna transform into?"

"Eh? Erm, I was hoping to transform into an angel... 'The Angel of Time' Lahtirika-sama..."

"Geez, so the original is a mythical being all along? That's a bit of a tough choice now isn't it... Well, that's fine. If you're going to do that then you should go to the academy's library and borrow some holy depictions and artworks. Keep looking at it until the competition arts and you should be fine."

"A-, Alright, I'll go take a look."

Then, Glen, who was still transformed into Lumia, quickly replied to Rin.

"Hey Rin, you'll be fine since it's you after all. You're much better than you think you are, and all you're really lacking is confidence. I can attest to that."

"S-, Sensei..."

"Even if it doesn't work out don't let it bother you too much. I did say that 'we'll win', but this is a festival you know? A festival. It's not like anyone will die 'cause of it, so no one can really complain either way. If we lose and someone blames you for it then I'll make sure to give them a good beating alright? So take it easy, got it?"

Then, Rin suddenly curled over, and began to giggle uncontrollably.

"...What's so funny?"

To be met with this reception despite finally acting serious for once, Glen couldn't help but feel a bit sulky.

"I-, I mean, despite using Lumia's appearance and voice, you're saying such manly things... It's just really weird..."

“Hmpf... S-, So that’s what it was huh... Well, you’re not wrong...”

That hit right on the bullseye. If I really wanted to talk serious business then I should’ve first released the spell.

Glen scratched his head, and prepared to release the spell. It was then that–

“Geez Lumia, so you were here all along. I’ve been looking for you.”

At some point in time, Sistina had arrived at the courtyard.

“Ah Sisti, what’s the matter?”

Rin, who had noticed Sistina earlier, asked.

“Ahaha, I just wanted to talk to Lumia about something.”

“Ah, no, I’m...”

<TL Note: Glen is using ‘俺’ (ore), the masculine pronoun for oneself. Lumia generally uses ‘私’ (watashi), which is gender-neutral.>

Without giving time for Glen to explain, Sistina smiled towards Glen and said.

“Let’s hurry up and eat lunch shall we? Lumia, didn’t I tell you that I would make your lunch as well today? Not to mention, it’s your favorite tomato sandwiches.”

“Eh...? Lunch...?”

Now that Sistina mentioned it, Glen noticed that she carried a large basket.

Does that mean that inside this is...!?

Hearing that, Glen reflexively gulped.

“There’s that guy’s part as well... but where did he go...?”

Sistina was murmured something to herself, but Glen decided that now wasn’t the time to care about that.

Sistina, who had packed a wholesome lunch, seems to have mistaken the transformed Glen for Lumia... Does that mean that this is a huge chance to score?"

If he handles the situation well, wouldn't he be able to lay his hands on those sandwiches?

...Don't be stupid now,, calm down, Glen

Glen entered a cold sweat and tried to internally laugh off the mischievous thoughts.

As an educator, how could I fool my students and steal away their lunches? That's a bit too evil isn't it! I'm not quite that depraved yet right!? I won't allow myself to fall that far!

"Lumia?"

Sistina slightly tilted her head, confused as to why Glen, in Lumia's appearance, was pressing his arms against his head whilst murmuring to himself.

To start with, I reap what I sow, don't I... If I push all the consequences onto my students, do I even have a right to call myself an instructor or a man? Heck, can I even call myself human at that point? I know that this chance has fallen right into my hands, but I should really come clean here and release my transformation magic, like any mature adult would...

But then...

Guuuuuu~

Glen stomach roared loudly.

"Pu-, ahaha! Were you that hungry Lumia?"

...Mm, then again, I can't get past this dire situation without making some sacrifices now can I? I should just sell my soul to the devil.

So then, Glen, in Lumia's appearance, drew closer to Sistina, and placed his hands on her shoulders.

"...Let's hurry up and chow d-... have lunch then white c-... Sisti! I'm hella... No I mean,

I'm really starved! Aha, ahahahaha...-!"

"W-, Why do you seem so desperate..."

Sistina couldn't help but sweat a little in response to 'Lumia's' uncharacteristic pressuring.

"Ah, but could you wait a minute? We need to look for that guy first."

"Eh? That guy?"

"Yep, that guy. Uhm, well... while I was making our portions, I ended up making some for that guy as well... No really, uhm, I just decided on a whim that I would make some extra while I was at it, so..."

Sistina, who had dragged the conversation into a different direction, appeared to be in denial. Her forehead seemed to be a little flushed as well.

"That doesn't matter alright! I don't really know who that guy is, but we really don't need to go look!"

"Lumia?"

"If we happen to come across Lumia while we were at it, then... No! I mean, my stomach is practically empty at this point you know! I feel like if I don't hurry up and eat something I'm gonna drop dead! So--"

"Uhm...Sensei...?"

Seeing Glen's overbearingly desperate act, Rin, who stood behind Glen, butted into the conversation.

Immediately, Glen turned around and clung onto Rin, and whispered.

(Please Rin-sama! Show me some mercy! Turn a blind eye to this alright!)

(No, that's not it...)

(It'll be fine! Of course, I won't eat all of Lumia's portion. Just one or two slices will do! I just want a little share! So please I beg you just do me a favor this one time! Just this

one time will dooo~~~!)

(Uhm... it's a bit embarrassing, but... The real Lumia is...)

“...Eh?”

As Glen hardened up in shock.

“Ah, Sisti, you were here?”

From behind him, came a familiar voice.

“Sorry for making you wait. I had to go do something... Huh?”

Seeing someone with her own appearance, Lumia, who had just entered the fray, tilted her head in confusion.

.....

All that this encounter resulted in was an uneasy silence.

“What’s happening here... Why the heck... Ah, Why are there two of me!? I-, I wonder who the fake is... ah how troubling indeed! We both look so much like the real thing, so I can’t really tell who the fake one is...”

“<Return to powerlessness!>”

Sistina softly chanted [Dispel · Force].

The magic Glen was sustaining was neutralized, and his false appearance was stripped off.

“...Well, that happened.”

Glen, who was now exposed, showed an emboldened smile, swept his hair up with one hand, and then immediately turned tail.

“Glen-sensei shall now make his cool exit alrighty?”

As Glen tried to casually escape the situation...

“You idiot—!”

Sistina’s [Gale · Blow] mercilessly swept him away...

“Gyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa—!?”

With a dreadful cry, Glen was blasted off into the horizon.

“Like I’d believe you! Scum! It’s unbelievable that a teacher would ever try to steal a student’s lunch! And to think that I woke up to do all this... Hmpf! I don’t care anymore!”

Sistina screamed with a flushed face.

Rin merely sighed to herself.

On the other hand, Lumia, who didn’t quite understand the situation, blinked a few times in surprise.

After recovering from the damage done by the spell, Glen quickly went to get lunch.

That being said, it was impossible for Glen, who had no money, to have a normal lunch. In recent days, the only lunch Glen has had are the branches of shroty trees.

Shroty trees are a species of deciduous trees with broad star-shaped leaves. The saps contained within the young branches had a high glucose content. If one were to suck on these branches, it was possible to extract a fair amount of glucose from it.

Since discovering the shroty tree near the entrance of the ‘Mysterious Forest’ situated in the northern expanse of the academy, Glen would often go to the tree before meals to gather branches for the sake of sustenance.

“Despite that...”

After retrieving the branches that would be today’s lunch, Glen sprawled exhaustedly on the bench as he chewed on a branch.

“Man, I can’t help but feel that I’ve really fallen as a person... Damnit... I’ll never gamble

ever again... *slurp*

Glen sucked on the shroty branch as his eyes moistened with tears of regret.

“Hah... dirt keeps getting in my eyes today...”

As Glen rubbed his eyes, his stomach erupted into a growl. Then—

“Ah, sensei~”

A fair distance away, Lumia appeared to be looking for something. When she spotted Glen, she hurriedly rushed over. She seemed to be holding onto something important.

“...Oh Lumia, what’s up?”

“Uhm... I have some refreshments for you.”

“Refreshments?”

As Glen looked on in surprise, Lumia handed the cloth bag over.

“Here are some sandwiches, sensei. Recently, it seems that you’ve been going hungry, so if you’d like—”

“You have my gratitude oh my dear angel! Then I shall accept your gracious blessings without delay—!”

Glen ecstatically received the bag from Lumia, and hastily opened it. What lay inside wasn’t really anything special – just plain tomato sandwiches – but for Glen, this was nothing less than first-class cuisine.

“Uwaaahh!? To be alive is a beautiful thing—!?”

“T-, That’s quite an exaggeration...”

Glen engrossedly sunk his teeth into the sandwich. The sour taste of the juicy tomatoes, the moderate saltiness of the seasoned ham, and the stringent texture of the thinly sliced cheese, all converged into an extravagant harmony. The pleasant fragrance of black peppers only served to further accentuate Glen’s overflowing emotions

Lumia took a seat beside Glen, and gazed at Glen as he gobbled down on the sandwiches with a wry smile.

“By the way... did you make these?”

“Yes, I made it just for you sensei... or so I would like to say, but I didn’t actually make these...”

Saying that, Lumia showed a playful smile.

“Ahaha, I’m really clumsy, so I’m not very good at cooking...”

“Is that right? Well then, who made these?”

“The person in question asked that to be kept a secret... Let’s just say that a cute girl in our class made these alright?”

“Hm, well, I guess that where these came from doesn’t matter too much to me.”

“Actually... that cute girl woke up early in the morning and tried her best to make these as she wanted to repay a debt to a boy that she was slightly bothered by. She isn’t really honest with herself, so she wasn’t able to hand these to him in the end...”

“I don’t know who she is, but that’s a shame...”

Glen sighed sympathetically.

“You know, that guy is a bit... well, I mean, the girl went through the trouble of making the lunch, so he should hurry up and notice already... Geez, he’s a lady-killer I guess, but he’s hella dense isn’t he? Well, he’s probably some kind of indecent jerk anyway. Oh dear oh dear, that girl really doesn’t have an eye for men.”

“A-, Ahaha...”

Lumia began to sweat a little for some reason, but Glen didn’t seem to notice.

“W-, Well, let’s not talk about that for now. Since it seemed like she would throw it away, I decided to take it and bring it to you.”

“Geez... am I a trash can or something? Well, I don’t really mind. Thanks for everything

again.”

Glen audibly exhaled from his nose in a sulky manner, and continued to munch on the sandwiches.

“Hey sensei, how are the sandwiches? Do they taste good?”

Hearing this question, Glen briefly considered the flavors that run rampant in his mouth

“Yep.”

Frankly replied Glen.

“It’s not too complicated and carefully made. Also, while it’s a bit on the orthodox side of things, it’s super delicious.”

Hearing Glen’s reply, Lumia showed a sweet smile.

It was as if her own cooking was being complimented instead.

After a short while, the bag that once contained the sandwiches was now empty.

“Hah—, I’m full I’m full... Thanks for the meal.”

“Hehe, glad you liked it... Well, I shouldn’t be the one to say that actually.”

<TL Note: Lumia’s ‘Glad you liked it’ is お粗末様 (osomatsu-sama) is an etiquette/ reply for the provider of a meal, however, Lumia is technically not the provider here.>

“I’ve been given three more days to live now... Hm, I should be able to keep on going now...”

“...?”

Unable to understand Glen’s murmurs, Lumia tilted her head slightly in puzzlement.

“Well then, now that I’m feeling a tad better, let’s get back to the stadium shall we?”

“Sure.”

Glen and Lumia rose from the bench.

Then—

“Excuse me, if I’m not mistaken, you are Glen? Uhm... May I have a bit of your time?”

As the two were about to leave, a female voice suddenly called out to them.

Glen, as if dealing with a nuisance, turned around to face the voice’s source.

“ é. As you can see, we’re to-tally not free right now, so – Huh, eh, EHHHHHHHHH—!?”

Once Glen realized the identity of the person behind him, he immediately began to scream.

“Y-, Y-, Y-, Your Majesty—!?”

The person standing there was none other than the Empress of the Alzano Empire, Alicia the Seventh...

“Now then, I wonder if Alice made it?”

Sitting at the balcony shaped V.I.P. stands, Serika sipped on black tea, passing the time in a graceful manner.

“That scene was quite a masterpiece wasn’t it!? Did you see the looks on the royal guard’s faces when they realized that Alice wasn’t here!?”

Serika’s shoulders trembled in her attempts to hold back her laughter.

“As one would expect of you, Serika-kun. Even the gods would be afraid of you...”

Seeing Serika’s carefree attitude, Headmaster Rick was nothing short of amazed.

“Hahaha, what are you saying headmaster. Compared to humans, gods are far less scary you know. Gods only have overwhelming and insurmountable power compared to humans. All they are is “strong”. On the other hand, humans—“

As Serika, who was clearly in a good mood, continued to chime on—

“Serika-sama...”

Elenora approached her with a somewhat heavy expression.

“Hm? What’s up?”

“Something terrible has happened... I hope that you could spare a moment to hear the details.”

“...What happened?”

Seeing Elenora’s serious expression, Serika’s straightened up.

And then—

“Actually.....”

Elenora whispered the details to Serika.

“W—What!? How could that have happened—!?”

Serika’s face turned pale. Her eyes, wide in surprise, were fixated on Elenora.

“W-, W-, Why is someone of your caliber here in a commoner’s area without your bodyguards!?”

In response to the sudden appearance of the Empress, Glen couldn’t help but shrink in fear.

“Ah, no, uhm, I sincerely apologize for my disrespectful conduct earlier—!”

His usual arrogant and audacious attitude was nowhere to be seen.

Glen fell to his trembling knees, and prostrated himself on the floor.

“Please raise your head, Glen. I am not here today as the Empress Alicia the Seventh,

but rather, as a mere citizen of the empire, Alicia. Now stand.”

“No, even if you say that, uhm... T-, Then if you would excuse me...”

Glen timidly rose to his feet.

“Fufu, it’s been a year hasn’t it Glen. How have you been?”

“Ah, pretty well I guess. Y-, You’re still the same as you were, Your Majesty...”

“...I have been meaning to apologize to you for a while now.”

Saying that, Alicia closed her eyes.

“Ah, apologize...? No...”

“Even though you’ve given your life for my sake, even though you’ve given your life to this nation... you ended up being discharged from the Imperial Court Magicians in such a shameful manner... I truly cannot find the words to express how ashamed and sorry I am for allowing that to happen...”

“No no please, I don’t really mind at all! No really! I mean, honestly speaking I quit because I came to hate work. I just got really lazy alright!? For real!”

Shaking both his head and his hands, Glen adamantly refused Alicia’s apology.

“That’s right... All I ever did was rely on you, so I never understood how hard it must’ve been for you... I’m a failure as an Empress. Now that I think about it, three years ago too...”

“No no no no no no no! I can’t let the Empress lower her head to a societal degenerate like myself! What are you going to do if someone sees this!?”

Glen cautiously surveyed his surroundings. The circumstances were fine for this occasion – perhaps too fine; There was not a single person to be seen, though Glen himself hadn’t noticed this.

“So Your Majesty... Uhm, what are you doing here...?”

“Hehe, that’s right, I came here to...”

Trailing off, Alicia turned her gaze sideways.

Her eyes now rest upon Lumia, who stood frozen in blank surprise.

“...It’s been a while, Alumiana.”

Alicia warmly greeted Lumia.

“.....”

Lumia wordlessly stared at Alicia’s nape where the jade gemstone of her golden necklace rested. Then, for reasons unbeknownst, Lumia closed her eyes.

“Have you been doing well? My my, in the time we’ve been separated, you’ve grown quite tall. Fufu, you’ve also grown up to be quite beautiful, just like when I was younger, totally♪”

“.....Ah.....m.....”

“Are the Phebellis treating you well? Are you uncomfortable in any way? Have you been eating well? Don’t force yourself to diet too hard or else you won’t grow properly alright? Also, no matter how busy you are, remember to take a bath everyday okay? You’re a girl of marriageable age, so you have to be careful about these things...”

“...Ah....U-, Uhm....”

Without noticing Lumia’s petrified state, Alicia continued to happily rattle on.

“Ah, I feel like I’m dreaming. I never thought that I would get the chance to talk to you again...”

Then, Alicia reached to grab ahold of Lumia.

“Alumiana...”

However—

“...If you would allow me to speak, Your Majesty.”

As if escaping from Alicia’s hand, Lumia dropped to one knee.

“!”

“Your Majesty... Uhm, excuse my manners, but I believe that you are mistaking me for someone else.”

Lumia said softly. Alicia, who had been in joy, froze in shock.

“I am Lumia. Lumia Tinsel. I’m afraid that Your Majesty has mistaken me for Princess Eyl Kel Alzano who passed away three years ago. Your Majesty’s governing duties must be straining, so I implore that you treat yourself with care...”

Lumia’s well-planned speech left Alicia and Glen at a loss for words.

“...Yes... that’s right.”

Showing a lonely, shallow smile, Alicia closed her eyes and continued.

“That girl... Alumiana passed away three years ago to sickness... My, how could I have possibly made such a misunderstanding? Fufu, I’m getting old aren’t I...”

<TL Note: What Alicia is saying literally means ‘Age can’t be taken back’, but as the word for age ‘歳’ (toshi) can also mean ‘opportunity’ or ‘time’, the phrase can also mean ‘time can’t be taken back’ or ‘opportunities can’t be taken’.>

Listening to Alicia’s sorrowful words, Glen scratched his head with a troubled expression.

Lumia on the other hand, simply continued in a plain fashion.

“Although it was a mistake, I cannot find the words to express my gratitude for Your Majesty’s overflowing sincerity that has graced a lowly peasant like myself with such affection...”

“No, I should be the one to say so. I apologize if I have caused you any trouble.”

For what felt like a long moment after that, the area was draped in a heavy solemnity.

Lumia did not say anything more. Alicia opened her mouth to say something... but soon closed it in resignation. The cycle repeated itself until—

“...It’s about time for you to go.”

As if trying to do away with lingering regrets, Alicia turned towards Glen.

“Glen, please take good care Alu—... Lumia alright?”

“...As you wish, Your Majesty.”

Under the gaze of Glen, who wanted to say something, Alicia left the area.

Finally, Alicia could no longer be seen from the courtyard.

“.....”

Lumia, who remained in a half-kneel, did not once raise her head to look at the departing figure...

“Of course she wouldn’t accept me as her mother... yes that’s right...”

Alicia lowered her shoulders dejectedly as she walked back to the stadium.

Although Alicia walked the well-trodden path, not a single soul seemed to realize that she was there. This was the effect of Serika’s warding magic.

“Alumiana...”

Alicia thought back to when they were about to touch, and how her child had avoided her by treating her as if she were a stranger—

No matter the reason, it remains true that I had betrayed my daughter, that I had abandoned my daughter. As I pronounced the girl named Alumiana to be deceased, her life as Alumiana had been denied from her.

Alumiana is a smart girl. I’m sure that she has figured out why I did that as a mother and as an Empress, but even if she understands that in her mind, she cannot accept that in her heart. Alumiana was still young when she was exiled. From what I understood from the reports, for a brief period after she was exiled, her emotions were unstable. She was at an age where she required her mother’s love, yet she was driven away in such a

manner. Surely, the result would've been the same no matter who it was.

Even so, she has grown into a gentle girl that is loved by everyone. However, it was not because she continued to live as Alumiana whose mother had abandoned her, it was because she had chosen to live her new life as a member of the Phebell family.

Of course, if one thought about it in such a manner, then the young girl that had been kneeling before Alicia was not Alumiana, but rather... Lumia.

“...What a shame, really...”

‘If I knew that I would end up so miserable and pained, I shouldn’t have listened to Serika and Elenora’s suggestions, and allowed myself to be content with looking from afar.’ Such thoughts floated in Alicia mind.

However, it was not the Serika nor Elenora’s fault. In the end, the wish to meet her daughter was hers alone. The two had merely noticed her feelings and acted accordingly.

As Alicia gloomily headed back towards the stadium—

“...Your Majesty.”

Hearing someone call out to her, Alicia raised her head.

Looking around her, she spotted a familiar face under the shadow of one of the trees of the forest path.

It was the commander of the royal guard, Zeros.

For some reason, he looked ghastly and severely distressed.

Huh, that’s odd, how did he manage to recognize me? Serika’s magic should still be in effect...

Carrying curious thoughts, Alicia called out to her devoted guard.

“My, I’ve been discovered haven’t I? I’m sorry that I went out on my own, Zeros. By the way... What are you doing here?”

“I have something to tell you, Your Majesty.”

Zeros soundlessly exited the shade, and stood in front of Alicia. Then, he rose a hand into the air.

It seemed to be some kind of signal.

“—!?”

A large amount of guards suddenly appeared and surrounded Alicia.

“...What’s the meaning of this?”

Unfazed by the sudden turn of events, Alicia softly asked.

“Please excuse our actions, Your Majesty. For now, we here will do all that we can to keep you restrained. However, I assure you that our disorderly actions are not in opposition to you or the nation. We are doing this out of our devotion for you and the nation, and we ask for you understanding. Please endure this for now.”

“Zeros...”

Alicia was not powerless. Although not quite at the level of Serika, she was a magician of considerable rank. If it were just a mob of bandits, she would have no trouble defending herself.

However, in situation where she was surrounded at this distance by numerous guards that were geared with anti-magic equipment and adept at close combat, there was nothing she could do.

“...I understand. Let’s first hear what you have to say.

Alicia resigned to the situation, and obeyed Zeros.

“...Unbelievable...”

The calm and composed manner through which Albert announced his thoughts seemed to contrast with its contents.

“What happened? Did you see something with your farsight magic?”

“The royal guards have—... ‘moved’.”

“...? What’s wrong with that? They’re living people aren’t they?”

“.....”

Albert, whose grim expression was not fazed in the least by her answer, decided to say nothing more. The two had a brief moment of silence.

“...The royal guard have forcefully placed the Her Majesty under their supervision. In reality though, this is closer to house arrest. However, commander Zeros... As far as I remember, he did not seem to be of the imprudent type, although I may need to reform my impression of him.”

“Okay.”

After hearing what Albert had to say, Riel started walking away without hesitation.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

Albert grabbed tightly onto Riel’s hair.

“I am going to cut down all the enemies of course.”

“Wait, there are too many enemies. It’s a bit too much even for you.”

“If the enemies have more forces, then we just need match them.”

“With reinforcements?”

“No, with spirit.”

“.....”

Albert, whose grim expression was not fazed in the least by her answer, decided to say nothing more. Again, the two had a brief moment of silence.

“...The imperial royal guard is the head of the orthodox right-wing and their members

are the ones who are most loyal to the Empress. It's inconceivable to think that they would do anything that would directly harm Her Majesty, so there must be some special motive behind their actions. What we will do is find the reasons behind these reckless actions, and then move to put the situation into order"

"I don't get it, but okay."

"Of course."

Silence. With the man still holding on to the girl's hair, it was truly an odd stillness.

The first one to break the silence was Riel.

"I have a plan. I will charge the enemy from the front. Albert will then charge in from the front after me."

"....."

Albert, whose grim expression was not fazed in the least by her answer, decided to say nothing more.

As usual, the two had a brief moment of silence.

The afternoon section of the Magic Games Festival began.

The first event of the afternoon was 'Remote Weightlifting', which pertained to the field of telekinetic matter manipulation. In this event, contestants used the white magic [Psy · Telekinesis] to lift bag fill with lead into the air without direct contact. The rule of simple; the more weight one lifted, the more points they would get.

After the secret meeting with Alicia, Glen led Lumia, who seemed to be in low-spirits, back to the stadium. Unlike the rest of the class who were still in high-spirits, Glen gazed absentmindedly at the weighted bags that were being lifted into the air.

Of course, the reason for Glen's absentmindedness was due to what unfolded between Lumia and Alicia.

In aftermath of the incident a month prior, Glen had been one of the few who learned

the secret of Lumia's true identity and the complicated circumstances surrounding her.

Despite knowing full well of her position as the Empress, as well as the possibility that her relationship to Lumia might be revealed, Alicia took the risk to meet Lumia. I get how she feels, and I sort of get how Lumia, who had rejected Alicia, feels as well.

I get it, but—

...Man, what the heck should I do?

All said and done, the only ones who can solve this problem are the two people involved. Regardless of how anyone else interferes, it won't make a hell of a difference. The problem isn't about reason or causation, but rather feelings. At the end of the day, it doesn't really matter how much I try to argue, suggest, or counsel them.

"...Geez, what a mess."

Glen released an exasperated sigh. Problems kept occurring one after another that there didn't feel like there was even time for him to catch his breath. The excited and rowdy students of his class seemed to exist in a different world altogether.

In this manner, Glen returned to his absentminded world.

Then—

"...Sensei."

Sistina, who seemed to have something on her mind, sullenly approached Glen and called out to him.

"Woah!? W-, What's the heck white cat!? You lookin' for a fight or somethin'!?"

Remember their exchange during afternoon break, Glen reflexively readied himself for a fist fight.

"...Lumia is missing..."

"H-, Huh!?"

“Now that I think about it... Since she went to go meet you and came back, she’s seemed a little off.”

“Huh? The heck? You knew that Lumia and I met?”

“Shut up!”

“Yikes! I’m sorry!?”

Having been suddenly yelled at, Glen pathetically curled into a ball.

“Sure, she doesn’t have any events in the afternoon, but she isn’t the type to skip out either, so I think it’s a little strange that she suddenly disappeared without saying anything.”

“...Well, that’s true.”

Like Glen, Sistina was also one of the few that knew of Lumia’s circumstances.

However, she didn’t know that Lumia had just met her mother – the Empress – in secret, so no one could blame her for these misguided thoughts.

Since Sistina was also involved, Glen thought that it would be better to tell her what had unfolded.

“Oi, white cat, bring your ear a little closer would you?”

“...?”

Then Glen relayed to Sistina, who seemed a bit suspicious of his intentions, about what had occurred between Alicia and Lumia.

“So that happened...”

Now that she knew the circumstances, she couldn’t help but feel troubled.

“So, the reason she’s disappeared is...”

It’s probably what you’re thinking. If I was in that situation, I’d want some peace and quiet as well.

‘Dear lord’, thought Glen as he let out a sigh.

“Well, I get why she’d want to be alone, but it’s probably for the best that we don’t let her deal with everything herself. It might not change the reality of the situation, but having a few friends to talk to won’t hurt right? Well, it’s not like holing yourself up somewhere will change anything either. Let’s go look for her and bring her back.”

Although he scratched his head as if he was annoyed, Glen quickly stood up from his seat to get going.

“White cat, you coming?”

“Yeah, I’ll—“

Sistina reflexively nodded...

“—No, I’ll wait here actually. You go look for her sensei. I’ll look after the class while you’re gone.”

For whatever reason, she decided on that.

“Hey, isn’t that a bit cold of you? Aren’t you guys like best buddies?”

“It’s because we’re best buddies... I really want to go... but in times like this... the person she’d want beside her the most would be...”

She turned her head to the side and murmured something. She seemed to be angry, resigned, sullen, sulky, jealous; all in all, she seemed to be going through a complex range of emotions and thoughts.

“I don’t get it, but just leave this to me. You alright with that?”

Then, as Glen left to go look for Lumia—

“...Hey, wait a second.”

Sistina suddenly called out to him.

“What is it now?”

Glen turned his head slightly to look at Sistina, but like before, Sistina seemed a bit dejected.

“There one thing I want to know. Sensei... Did you get something from Lumia?”

“Ah-? I got some sandwiches from her you know. I think that she got them from someone who was about to throw this all out. What about it?”

“Uhm... How was it? The sandwiches I mean.”

“Huh?”

“It was terrible right? Hmpf... Thank you very much for doing a service to the community by being a pitiable garbage disposal I guess.”

“...Huh? No, but really now, it was super delicious.”

For whatever reason, Sistina immediately turned away from Glen.



Seeing Sistina's reaction, Glen furrowed his eyebrows, scratched his head, and proceeded to give his honest opinion.

"...Hey, if that's what you think then that's fine, but isn't that a bit rude to the person who made those sandwiches? It's really not like you at all. You're usually pretty kind to anyone that's not me."

"I-, I get it already! Just hurry up and get going, geez!"

Man, if she's gonna yell at me like that would it hurt to say it to my face!? I don't get what she's so angry about, but from what I can see, her face is red to it's roots.

"Ah... Oh dear."

I seriously don't get her at all. How should I know what she's thinking anyway? Not to mention, she gets angry easily. If she was at least one percent as cute and understandable as Lumia, my life would be sooooo much easier.

Though, perhaps that was too much for him to ask. In this manner, Glen left the stadium.

Glen didn't find Lumia at the courtyard.

With no clues to follow, Glen could only rely on his instinct.

"This is bad... Where the heck did she go...?"

First, Glen looked through the academy's main, west, and east buildings once through. Then, he quickly skimmed through the academy's library and the plaza in front of it, and scoured through the area near the mysterious forest's entrance, the medicinal garden, and the magic experimentation tower.

However, Lumia was nowhere to be found. Not discouraged by this, Glen continued to aimlessly search through the academy's grounds, which felt rather empty due to the people gathered at the stadium. The search seemed to stretch on endlessly.

At this point, even Glen was starting to feel impatient. Then, at the southwest end of the academy grounds, near the fencing that surrounded the academy, under the

shadow of one of the evenly-planted trees, he finally found a glimpse of familiar, golden hair.

“...Finally found you.”

Glen walked towards the shade of the tree.

At his destination sat Lumia. Leaning her back against the tree, her eyes fixated on something she held in her hands.

“...Lumia? Whatcha’ lookin at? ...Ah, a locket?

Although Glen hadn’t intended to peek, due to the angle and direction through which he approached Lumia, he happened to catch a glimpse of what she had in her hand.

She then opened the locket, and peered at it

“There’s nothing inside...”

Noticing Glen approach, Lumia closed the locket, and grasped tightly onto it.

“I have a feeling that there were portraits of important people inside... but it disappeared some time ago.”

<TL Note: Lumia does not actually use a pronoun in the second part, thus there is an implication that ‘it’ can also be ‘they’.>

“.....”

Lumia showed a lonely smile to Glen, who remained silent. She connected the ends of the locket’s chain behind her neck, and slipped the locket under her clothes.

“This isn’t particularly valuable... but even now, I keep it close to me. Weird isn’t it?”

“...There’s nothing weird about that.”

Glen looked away, scratched his head a little, and replied in a blunt fashion.

“I don’t know circumstances as to why or what’s gone, but even now there’s something important to you inside this thing isn’t there?”

“.....Sensei”

As if focusing her resolve, Lumia sharply asked.

“Do you know? ...About me and the Empress.”

“Ah, yeah, I heard it from the big guys of the government after the incident a while back.”

Then, Glen turned his back to Lumia.

“But who cares really. Oi, let’s go Lumia, everyone is waiting for you. The happy-go-lucky magic games festival’s second half is gonna start.”

And began to walk away.

“Fufu, you’re always just you aren’t you, sensei?”

Lumia couldn’t help but smile a little.

“You’re supposed to say some kind words to the depressed girl right now you know.”

“To be real, I don’t really know what I’m supposed to say.”

Glen said without weaving his words.

Seeing Glen like this, Lumia began to giggle, although it seemed that she was trying to hold back.

“Uhm... Then could you accompany me for a little longer?”

“...Ah.”

Lumia leaned her back against the tree again, and Glen stared aimlessly at the sky with his back faced to her.

And so, Lumia began to talk.

What Lumia spoke of was truly unreserved.

It was about her time as the princess. Her gentle mother who, despite being busy with governing duties, would always set aside time to play with her. Her kind sister who would always look after her. Although her life as a lady of the legitimate royal bloodline truly bore no inconveniences, it was definitely an inconvenient life. Despite that, she recalled the memories of those days where she felt that she was truly blessed—

But having been stripped of her title of princess, having been chased away from the palace, Lumia of House Phebell did away with all these memories. Yet, in the end, what should have been forgotten, but ultimately hadn't been, continued to flow forth from the depths of her heart.

“...Just what should I do?”

Having said all that she had to say, Lumia softly asked Glen.

“I understand the reason why the Empress abandoned me... For the sake of the royal family, for the sake of the nation's future she had no choice but to do what she did. Even so... somewhere in my heart, I can't forgive the Empress for doing what had to be done... Maybe I'm just angry...”

“Well, that's cause it's unreasonable.”

“Despite everything, I want to call her ‘mother’ again, I want to hug her again... A part of me still thinks so... I really am unfair... aren't I...?”

“Well, that is pretty unreasonable.”

“But if I call her my mother, then I would be betraying Sisti's mother and father, who took me in and treated me like their own child... I can't do that to them...”

“Uhuh. Well, of course that's unreasonable.”

“I just don't understand anything anymore. What's the right thing to do? What should I do to make things right again...”

Lumia closed her eyes.

In a seemingly annoyed manner, Glen released a sigh.

“This is just my opinion ok? When making each and every choice in their lives,

humans, as living beings, tend to think about how they might regret it, how they might be hurt by it. Then the natural choice to make would be the one that they would regret the least right? Well, I can guarantee that those are all lies... or actually, impossible.

“Is that so...?”

Glen nodded his head and continued.

“Don’t’ you think god is a really evil guy? If you see two paths before your eyes, then no matter how long you worry or think about it, you eventually have to choose one. But after all’s said and done, whichever path we chose just leaves us with the thought that ‘I should’ve chosen the other one’... God just keeps making people who always regret what they’ve done in the end don’t’ you think? No matter how meticulously you try to avoid making a choice, the fact that the choices exists always comes back to haunt you. What a shitty job he’s done.”

Then, Glen thought back to his own past.

Once ago, Glen had admired the magicians of justice that appeared in picture books, and set his sights on becoming one himself. Yet, all that he was left with even now was the extreme regret of having chosen this path on a whim. “The path that I chose was wrong.’ ‘I should have chosen differently.’ These thoughts repeated in his mind countless times.

However, if he had forsaken his dream and walked a different path, would all his troubles and suffering disappear? No, ‘I shouldn’t have given up on my dream and tried my best’... If he hadn’t chosen that path, then he would surely suffer from that decision as well.

“That’s why it’s important to be true to yourself.”

“...True to myself?”

“Mhm, if you’re going to regret either way, I’d be just a tad bit better if you choose the path you really want don’t ‘cha think? Regret it all you like later, but at the end of the day, don’t you feel like you can keep moving forward down the path you chose?”

“B-, But... I don’t understand how I really feel...”

In response, Glen scratched his head as he said.

“I used to be a magician of the Imperial Army... I know it might be surprising, but...”

Unable to understand the intent behind Glen’s words, Lumia felt uneasy.

“For work reasons, I had a lot of opportunities to visit the Imperial Court you see? And you know that important thing you were looking at just a moment ago? I’ve seen a certain important person of wear the exact sample thing there... You get what I mean?”

“...-!”

Taken aback, Lumia reflexively pressed her hands against her chest.

“About the matching thing that you’ve kept with you all this time, haven’t there been plenty of chances for you to throw it away? ...If that’s the case, isn’t the answer already clear as day?”

“The answer...”

“You can hate, grudge and complain for all I care, but let’s start with being honest with yourself okay? If you keep running away like you did just now, nothing will ever get resolved. Well, I’m sure it doesn’t sound convincing when I do the same thing all the time... but let’s leave that aside for now.”

For a brief moment, Lumia stayed silent.

As before, Glen had his back faced towards Lumia as he silently waited for her answer.

Then—

“I’m... scared.”

Lumia murmured. She spoke so softly that was seemed like her voice would disappear any moment.

“The day before I was exiled, she was still so kind to me. Yet, on that day, when I was called out by her on that day, everyone there looked grim and horrified... And all she did was look at me with such a cold gaze... It was as if she had transformed into someone else...”

“.....”

“She was kind to me a moment ago... but what if she suddenly turns to look at me with that gaze again...? Just thinking about it... I’m scared... that’s why... uhm...”

Having already decided, Lumia looked up towards Glen.

“Would you stay with me, sensei?”

“...Dear oh dear, what can I say? I didn’t think you still had such a childish side to you.”

Shrugging his shoulders with an amused smile, Glen turned to face Lumia.

“Fine by me. I’ll come with you.”

“Really?”

“...If I lied to you here I’d simply be a terrible person.”

“Geez, sensei~”

As Glen sighed, annoyed, Lumia laughed in a weird fashion.

And so, Glen accompanied Lumia and they left for their destination.

The two of them shared a tranquil and soothing atmosphere.

‘Now then, now that I’ve said all that, how should I actually make this happen?’
Noticing that he brought the trouble upon himself, Glen began to rack his brain.

But—

“...Hm?”

Then, Glen noticed a strange group that ahead on the path that he and Lumia were walking on.

All the members of the group were covered in armor on the important areas of the body, wore a scarlet colored surcoats, and carried a rapier at their waists.

There were five of them in total.

Grouping into a crescent-shaped formation, they swiftly pressed down the path towards Glen.

“Those surcoats... are they from the royal guard?”

The best of the best of the Imperial Army. Composed of the troops that were greatly devoted to the Empress, they stood as the guardians that placed the royal family above all else; that was the royal guard.

As the Empress was currently visiting the academy, it was a given that they patrol the vicinity of the Empress and carry out their bodyguard duties, but—

“What the heck are they doing leaving the Empress behind and coming all the way over here?”

As Glen tilted his head in puzzlement, the royal guards arrived and stopped in front of Glen. As if to surround Glen and Lumia, the guards silently and deftly spread apart.

“Lumia Tinsel...right?”

The person standing in front of the two, who appeared to be the leader of the squad, asked in a hushed voice.

Glen and Lumia exchanged a glance.

“...If I’m not mistaken, you are Lumia Tinsel right?”

“Eh? Y-, Yes... that’s right...”

As the question was repeated again as if recited from a script, Lumia perplexedly replied.

In the moment that Lumia replied—

Like springs being released, the guards drew their swords and charged towards Lumia.

“—!?”

Suddenly faced with numerous blade edges, Lumia instinctively flinched.

“...What’s the meaning of this, you guys?”

Glen, stood in front of Lumia and covered for her, questioned the guards with an intimidating voice.

“Listen closely. We are the agents carrying the Empress’ will.”

The guard who appeared to be the leader turned a disdainful glance towards Glen, and boldly announced such.

“Lumia Tinsel. You have schemed to assassinate Her Majesty Empress Alicia the Seventh, and planned to overturn the empire. There is no vindication for you! For your Lèse-majesté against her Majesty and your acts of treason to the nation, I hereby sentence you to death by my hand! This is the imperial order handed down by the Empress!”

In the face of the reality that seemed to stray from reality itself—

Glen and Lumia couldn’t help but freeze in place.

CHAPTER 4

NOSTALGIC COMRADES-IN-ARMS

The heavy silence yielded an inexplicable pressure.

The surrounding emptiness disconnected them from the outside world. Despite being a part of the games earlier, the tumultuous cheers and commentation suddenly felt so distant.

At a corner of the academy where no one could be seen other than Glen, Lumia, and the guards that surrounded them—.

“I... I... planned to assassinate her Majesty...? Execution...?”

Lumia’s shoulders trembled in shock.

“We have all the evidence we need, criminal scum. There is no chance of a pardon nor any need for explanation. Surrender now and be cut down by my blade.”

Said the captain to the trembling girl.

<TL Note: The chapter calls the ‘captain’, ‘soldier who appeared to be the captain’ throughout, but is shortened to ‘captain’ in this translation>

The drawn sword gleamed with sinister light and murderous intent.

This wasn’t a joke, not even in the slightest.

“I recommend that you do not resist. If you plead guilty to your crime and accept the punishment, I will allow you to have a painless death. I will guarantee that I will put an end to your life as quickly as I can.”

Lumia began to drip with cold sweat. She lowered her head speechlessly, her face pale from shock and fear.

The captain then spoke to Glen, who had moved to shield Lumia.

“And you, that girl is a criminal. If you insist on trying to protect her, then I am left no choice but to punish you for the crime of treason against the Empire. Now, hand that girl over.”

“... If this is a joke, then it's of bad taste.”

Glen rose his voice to adamantly bite back at the soldiers and stared them down.

“Lumia is trying to assassinate the Empress? Don't make me laugh. If you're serious, show me some proof would you?”

“We have no obligation to disclose evidence to outsiders. This is a highly political problem that common citizens like you needn't know about.

Faced with the soldier's oppressive attitude, Glen grew exasperated, and snapped back.

“Don't screw with me! You're saying that you're going to punish her without a trial or warrant!? What sense does that make!? Since when did the Empire reduce themselves to a group of savage barbarians? How about I read you the imperial charter from the beginning you stupid retards!”

“Insolent peasant, you are the one who needs to read it. Her Majesty the Empress is the highest authority of the nation. Her words are above the law, and are of utmost priority.”

“Huh-!? For your knowledge, I don't intend to start debate with you about how law works!”

“Hmpf, the same goes for me. I don't know what kind of dirty place you come from, but if you plan on continue to defend this felon, then I shall hand down my punishment on both you and the criminal.

“... The hell? Have you gone nuts or something?”

“In any case, your rude manner of speech against myself, a loyal subject of her Majesty the Empress, is no different from insulting her Majesty. I believe I've made a more than fair case for Lèse-majesté?”

“Stop screwing with me you shit...!”

As the scene gradually heated up and both refused to back down, the atmosphere became progressively more hostile.

The first person that attempted to calm the situation was Lumia.

“Please wait, sensei!”

Having made her decision, Lumia shouted out.

“...I will do as you say.”

Said Lumia firmly, as she clasped her trembling hands before her chest.

“...Huh? O-, Oi...”

Glen fretfully and perplexedly turned his head towards Lumia.

“I’m afraid that this is the Empress’ Grudge. Thinking back, I embarrassed her with my disrespectful conduct. I will atone for that with my life, so I hope you can show some mercy. Sensei is... He is unrelated to any of this!”

“You idiot! What are you sa—

Glen cried out in rage, but...

“You can’t, sensei.”

His protests were silenced by Lumia, who had taken the initiative.

“If you keep trying to cover me, you’ll become involved in my troubles as well...”

“No! You know that it’s not true! How can the stupid stuff he’s saying be true!? There has to be a misunderstanding! Isn’t that right!? So why are you you accepting it... DAMNIT!”

Glen raised a fist into a fighting stance.

Recognizing that he intended to obstruct them, the guards instantly turned towards Glen.

“D-, Don’t do this sensei! Please stop!”

“Sensei...? Oho? So you’re a magic instructor at this academy? Hmpf, your resistance is futile, instructor. Do you think you can fight all five of us at once? We’re all battle-experts you know?”

“Huh? So what? We won’t know unless we’ve try right? So what are you guys waiting for? Scared?”

Glen ran his mouth and taunted the guards. In the next moment, the five brandished silver blades rung as they cut through the air.

By the time Glen realized it, the five swords that flew faster than the eye could follow were pressed against his neck and throat in all directions.

“...mgh.”

Glen reflexively suppressed his voice.

The coordinated move of the five soldiers was certainly well practiced, if not perfect. If the distance between them and Glen was a bit farther, or if it had been a one-on-one, then it would’ve been a different story altogether, but their synchronized timing of their strikes had left no room to even attempt to dodge.

“A bluff won’t work. Just what can a magician do at this distance? Besides, we’re all equipped with magic-resistant armor. Against us, the tri-elemental assault and mind corruption spells you magicians like so much won’t work. That said, do you still want to fight? You alone against five elites?”

Glen clicked his tongue in frustration.

There’s nothing I can do at this distance and situation. Even if I’m prepared to die for this, I can take down one or two of them, but then the rest would skewer me alive.

Then I wouldn’t be able to save Lumia.

“And it’s not just the five of us you know? We have split ourselves into groups to order to search for this girl, so our total forces amount to far more than this. Even if you manage to break through now, what would you do then?”

“...!?”

“Back down now, magician. This is my final warning.”

Sweating, Glen glanced at the guard’s surroundings him as if to look for an opening.

“Please sensei... It’s fine now, it’s fine now, so please... If you keep doing this, even you will...”

As Lumia tearily pleaded, Glen finally came to a halt.

The fists that were so eager moments ago now hung powerlessly at his side, as if representing his crestfallen will.

Seeing that he no longer intended to resist, the soldiers slowly withdrew their swords from Glen.

“...Sorry.”

“You don’t need to apologize.”

To Glen who was now haggard and stricken, Lumia showed a firm smile.

“...I guess this is goodbye.”

“Mm.”

“This happened so fast it doesn’t seem real.”

“...Mm”

“Please take care of Sisti.”

“...Let me just say this.”

“Hey sensei... Actually, I l—“

“This is important.”

Glen raised his head towards Lumia, and with a sincere expression, he said.

“...At the very least, close your eyes when the time comes. If you do that... then there won't be anything to be afraid of.”

In the next moment—

“—Gah!?””

A soldier struck the back of Glen's head with the hilt of his sword.

Glen fell to his knees, and fell to the floor, where he remained silent and still.

“Ahhh-!? Sensei! W-, What are you—”

“Rest assured, he is only unconscious. It would be troublesome if a magician were to resist.”

As Lumia clung onto the fallen Glen, one of the soldiers grabbed ahold of Lumia's arm.

“Now more importantly, criminal, come here! Hurry it up!”

The other soldiers pointed their swords at Lumia as she was taken away.

“Alright, this is fine! Now stand still!”

Lumia was brought under a tree, where her hands were then tied behind her back. With swords pressing against her neck from every direction, it was impossible to move an inch.

Then, the captain, who appeared to be the one who would carry out the sentence, raised his sword into a stand in front of Lumia.

“Relax your body, and don't move. If you make any sudden movements, it will only extend your suffering.”

For a while, Lumia stared at the point of the blade with a distant, hollow gaze.

“...Okay.”

She took a deep breath of air, and adhering to Glen's parting words, gently shut her eyes.

Lumia Tinsel had long been prepared for this day—

Originally, I should have died three years ago. If my existence were to be made public, it would cause chaos both inside and outside the country. In order to protect this country, I was meant to be killed without anyone knowing.

This wasn't anything special. Between the battles for the succession of the throne, the conflicts between the several factions involved with royalty, and the sacrifices to be made for the sake of empowering the nation; there have been a countless numbers of times where members of royalty were killed for different purposes. I had been merely one of those many.

Yet, I'm still alive.

Alicia had taken pity on me, and forced a path where I would continue living. I surely had no choice but to accept my death, but I'm still alive here and now. I have truly been lucky.

Thus, Lumia came to the realization that the reason she lived to this day was nothing but pure and simple luck.

'A day like this would eventually come'... She would often think.

Although she had been reduced to a mere commoner, Lumia's existence within the Alzano Empire itself was an unstable bomb waiting to blow. As the Empress whose duty was to support the nation, her mother would someday be forced to come to the decision to deal with her... So she always carried that resolution in her heart.

The sudden announcement of her execution, was probably... just another scenario through which her final moments would be carried out.

That's why even Lumia herself felt that she was unexpectedly calm when the inevitable moment had actually arrived.

Yet, despite that—

...It's scary, isn't it?

I've been prepared for this, but in the end, the thought of dying still scares me. I can't

stop shaking, my heartbeat won't slow, my chest hurts, I can't breathe, I can't even think straight—

More than that, there's Sisti who treated me like a real sister, her parents who treated me like their real daughter, the classmates that I get along with, and... – Glen. It's sad that I have no choice but to say goodbye to everyone like this.

'Someone save me', she thought. 'I don't want to die'.

She wanted to curl into a ball and weep.

In the end... I still don't want to die...

I want sensei to teach me many things. I want him to remember... how he saved my life three years ago. I still want to do so much, see so much, and talk about so many things with Sisti.

And finally, just once more, with my mother, I—

...Ahah, that's right...

She had finally realized it.

Finally... I want to meet her one more time...

She could feel the tears trickling down her cheeks.

Glen was right. I already knew what I really wanted since the beginning.

If only I had been a bit more honest to myself... Why was I being so obstinate back then...?

However, it was all too late. Too late... for anything.

...Goodbye.

Tears rolled from the corners of her eye and down her cheek—

Then came a flash—

And with it, an explosion-like sound echoed above her head.

“Ugyaaaaaahh—!?”

In exchange for the burning pain that would mark her death, Lumia’s ears were struck with a ear-wrenching shriek.

“...-!?”

Out of surprise, Lumia inadvertently opened her eyes.

“U-, AHHH...-!? My eyes, my eyes—!”

“Ugh... I-, I can’t see... I can’t see anything...-!”

All Lumia saw were soldiers who had dropped their weapons on the floor with their hands pushed up against their eyes as they cried out in pain.

What? Lumia blinked her eyes and—

“See? It was good that you closed your eyes right?”

With a thankful expression on his face, Glen, who had gotten up at some point, ran up to Lumia.

“Geez, that hurt... knocking me on the head all sudden like that. Well, it didn’t work in the end cause he thought I was just a normal magician. My forte is actually close-combat, so a hit like that won’t do me in.”

Then, he glanced at the soldiers who panickedly clasped their eyes.

“Also, against enemies that direct spell attacks don’t work on, you can use this sorta method to deal with them.”

“S-, Sensei... W-, What exactly...”

As Lumia was unable to comprehend the turn of events, Glen proudly replied.

“I used the spell [Flash · Light], and let it burst on top of your head.”

The black magic [Flash · Light]. It was a elementary self-defense spell that released an intense flash of light to blind the opponent's eyes. Of course, it didn't contain any lethal force, but—

"If you use it right, it's actually pretty strong... and heave-ho-!"

"Guah—"

"Ah-!?"

Glen struck the necks of the guards around him with hand-chops and knocked them out one after another.

"Y-, You bastard-! To use such an underhanded method...!"

The captain who was the last man standing picked up his fallen sword and put up a stance. However, since his vision wasn't restored, his body swayed to one side.

"Pfft! 'I'm covered in magic resistant equipment so tri-elemental assault and mind pollution spells won't work', you said? Puhahaha, you idiot! Do you think those are the only weapons that magicians have!? Did you swallow the army's textbook or something!? Your actual combat experience is seriously lacking."

"Guh, damn you. You should know that an insult to us, is an insult to the Em— Gah, ugh...!?"

Before he could finish, Glen threw his right fist straight at the center of the soldier's nose.

"I'm not gonna wait and listen idiot. By the time you finish you'll probably have your vision back..."

Glen looked down disgustedly at the guard that face-planted on the floor with a *plop*.

"Now then, let me release you from those, Lumia."

Glen took out a small folding knife and cut the ropes that bound Lumia's hands.

"S-, Sensei... what did you do... You attacked the royal guards... Just why did you...?"

After being freed, Lumia stood silent in shock for a brief moment. However, after grasping the severity of the situation, befuddled voice.

“Wellllll—, erm, how should I say this? My tongue kinda slipped, then my hands slipped as well! Whatever should I do?”

“Whatever should I do?... Did you not think this through!? At this rate you’ll be charged with treason as well, sensei!”

“Ah, mm, erm... I guess that’s pretty bad.”

Despite his tone, the discomfort on Glen’s expression was obvious. His forehead trickled with cold sweat.

Seeing that expression of his, one could tell that he hadn’t put much consideration beforehand.

“Please run sensei! If someone sees you here—”

“It’s fine. I’m sure there are some people who are willing to talk amongst the royal guards. Let’s find him first...”

“Found them—! Over here—!”

Suddenly, the angry voice from a third party rang through the area.

Looking in the direction, Glen saw a new group of soldiers heading towards them.

“L-, Look! Our allies were killed!”

“Damn you, nefarious criminal scum! I swear to put you down with my blade!”

“I shall clear the regrets of my comrades who have fallen in their duty!*

In their vigor and misunderstanding, the soldiers exuded high levels of malice. At this point, it seemed like there was no longer any room for negotiation.

As the soldiers quickly approached and drew their blade, Glen’s expression of discomfort seemed to pale.

“You guys, did you moms not teach you that you should let people finish what they have to say?”

“W-, What should we do sensei!? At this rate, you will—”

“There’s no time for ‘should’, we just gotta roll with it—”

“Kyaa-!?”

Glen picked up Lumia into a princess carry and dashed towards the fences that surrounded the academy.

“<Logic of the three realms · The rules of balance · The disc of law shall hence sink leftward>-!”

Chanting the three-stage spell, Glen took a running jump.

Then, with power that human legs could not possibly achieve, the two flew through the air.

The black magic [Gravity · Control]. By using the spell to weaken the effects of gravity, their bodies became as light as feathers.

Lumia and Glen, who carried the former, leaped clear of the fence and outside the academy.

Cancelling the spell and landing on the ground, Glen made a mad dash towards the town.

“T-, They got away-!?”

“After them! Don’t let those rebels escape—!”

The voices shouted after Glen, but he had no time .

“Ah, come on already damnit! Why is it just one thing after another today!? I said I friggin’ hate workinggggg—! WOOOOO! Hurray for shut-in life—!”

Amidst a spectacle where a raging torrent of men relentlessly pursued him, Glen’s grievous and heart-spoken cries echoed far and away.

In this deadly game of tag, Glen seemed to have found his first victory by using the terrain to his advantage. Reaching a certain deserted back-alley, Glen confirmed that he had finally lost his pursuers, and set Lumia down.

“Hah, hah... Geez, this has become a real pain in the ass...”

Glen leaned his back against the alley wall, and gasped for air whilst wiping his sweat.

“Now then, what are we gonna do about this...”

As Glen caught his breath and considered the options, Lumia asked.

“Sensei... why...?”

Lumia’s expression didn’t betray her bitter feelings regarding the sudden turn of events.

She was probably deeply regretting getting Glen involved.

“Do you understand that if this goes on, you will...”

“No, I mean, if I leave you alone White Cat’s gonna give me a hell of a scolding. Her lectures hurts my damn mind so I would rather not honestly.”

Despite the situation, Glen was still joking around; even Lumia of all people felt irritated by this.

“This isn’t the time to joke around! If you don’t think seriously about this, you’ll be killed for treason against the nation you know!? Sensei!”

“Mhm, that would be pretty bad wouldn’t it... I wonder if I’ll be let off the hook if I use my past accomplishments as a bargaining chip... Would that work...? Probably not I guess...? Hmm....”

Despite the severity of their situation, Glen attitude was the same as always. His impudence and shamelessness seemed to know no bounds; one could say that his

attitude was actually refreshing.

It was to the point where it made her feel stupid for treating the situation so seriously. Lumia could only release a long sigh.

“Hey sensei. I only have one question, so please answer to this honestly.”

Asked Lumia. It was as if she had given up on trying to change Glen’s mind.

“What’s up?”

“Why did you save me? Right now, you’ve been put in a really dangerous position you know? It wouldn’t be strange if you were killed. Why did you go so far for my sake...?”

Depending on his reason, there might be some room to plead mercy for extenuating circumstances.

So Lumia hoped above all else that Glen would be able to answer her honestly—

“Ah-, who knows? Maybe I’ve fallen in love with you or something? You know, it’s the kind of stupid thing where a man will go to the ends of the earth for the woman he loves or something like that? Doesn’t that happen a lot throughout history? So anyway, you get it now? If you get it then shush. I have a lot of things to think about.”

“Sensei, please answer seriously!”

Towards Glen, who failed to treat it seriously to the point where he made it seem like it was someone else’s problem, Lumia raised her voice in agitation.

Glen glanced towards Lumia, whose shoulders slightly trembled in reigned anger as she looked straight into his eyes with a heavy expression. Then, he scratched his head awkwardly and murmured with a subdued voice.

“...It’s cause I promised.”

“Promised?”

Lumia pressed onward, unable to understand Glen’s answer.

“No, it’s nothin”

Although he shrugged it off, Glen had surely said that ‘he promised’.

‘What kind of promise was it?’ ‘Who did you promise?’ Lumia wanted to continue, but Glen placed a hand on her head and patted her, as if to stop her from continuing.

“Well, don’t worry about it. I didn’t do it on a whim, so it only seems like I’m being reckless... Well, even if it wasn’t on a whim, that might’ve still been reckless of me...”

“Sensei...”

“It’ll be alright. The Empress... No, your mother would never do something like punish you without so much as a trial. For an execution order to suddenly be given... There has to be something going on behind the scenes. Trust me.”

‘Why was he so sure?’ Lumia couldn’t quite understand Glen’s confidence.

“Our victory condition is pretty simple. As long as we’re able to avoid the guards and reach the Empress, we win. Once we meet her, she’ll be able to resolve the misunderstanding.”

‘Why was he able to say it so definitively?’ Lumia still couldn’t understand.

However, blind to Lumia’s doubts, Glen continued to brainstorm.

“The problem is how we’ll get to her, but...”

The Empress was currently in the magic academy in northern Fejiti. As of now, Glen and Lumia were currently in the west area. Surely, by now, the royal guards would have placed all the town gates under lockdown, and began a sweep of the entire town. Not to mention, it was a given that there would also be guards stationed around the Empress for her protection as well.

Even if they ran back, it was practically impossible to get an audience with her.

“...Huh? Are we donezo?”

Now that he thought about it calmly, Glen couldn’t help but break into a cold sweat when faced with the inevitable tightrope that he would have no choice but to walk.

“Wait, there’s no need for us to go meet her directly now is there!”

Whilst wincing about his own stupidity, Glen took a half-gemstone out of his pocket.

“Sensei, what’s that?”

“It’s a magic tool used for long distance communication. If you split a gemstone into two pieces and imbue it with magic, sound can pass from one stone to the other and be used as a means of communication. The other piece is with Serika, so if I use it I should be able to talk with her.”

Of course, Serika had been the one to make it. Given Glen’s skill it wasn’t possible for him to make such a high-level magic tool.

“Well anyway, Serika should be with the Empress at the V.I.P. stands right now. If we talk to the empress through Serika, we should be able to put an end to the royal guard’s rampage.”

Glen hurriedly chanted the spell to activate the communication magic tool.

The sound of metallic resonance rung from the gemstone.

Then—

“...Glen?”

Serika answered from the gemstone.

“Ah Serika! Al-right alright, you actually answered the first time around! I was wondering what the heck I was gonna do if you didn’t like that other time a while ago!”

“.....”

For some reason, Serika remained silent. It was probably out of a distaste for the other person’s manner of speech.

“...Serika? Well, whatever. Hey, so I need some help right now. Actually, I’ve been mercilessly dragged into a kinda troublesome incident, and—”

Before Glen could continue—

“I can’t do anything.”

“—!?”

The immediate reply came in the form of a blunt refusal, the intent behind which could not be read.

“Oi, wait, I haven’t even said anyth—“

“Sorry. I can’t say anything, Glen.”

“Hah? What’s your deal? Hey quit the bullshit you idiot! I’m being serious h—“

Losing his patience as one would expect, Glen began to rapidly rattle his complaints.

“I’ll say this one more time alright Glen? I can’t do anything, and I can’t say anything either.”

“—!?”

Glen finally noticed that there was something strange about Serika’s current circumstances.

At the very least, it appeared that this sequence of events wasn’t an open-and-shut case; contrary to his expectations.

“...Hey Serika, just answer what you can. Do you know what kind of situation I’m in?”

“...I know the gist of it.”

“And you can’t do anything about it?”

“Mhm.”

“Is the empress with you?”

“...Mhm.”

“What happened? Why are the royal guards running amok?”

“.....”

The question was met with silence.

“Why did the Empress ostensibly put down the imperial order to ‘Kill Lumia’?”

“.....”

This question too, was met with silence.

It seems like this is part of what she ‘can’t say’.

What kind of situation is this? What the heck is happening? Serika is the leading seventh-rank magician of the continent. What happened to restrict Serika to this extent?

Damnit, I don’t get it at all... What the hell is this...?

Glen showed a bitter expression as he pressed a hand to his head in distress.

“Let me tell you one thing Glen. You’re the only one.”

“What?”



“You’re the only one who can break through this situation. Yes, you’re the only one.”

“What do you mean by that exactly...?”

“Think through what I mean Glen, and do whatever you can to come before the Empress. If you can get here I can do something about the guards... It’ll be risky to keep talking, so I’m cutting the connection.”

“O-, Oi!”

Leaving behind nothing but ambiguous words, Serika cut the connection on her side.

Regardless of how many times I cast the spell and activate the gemstone, it doesn’t seem like Serika will reply.

“I just don’t get it... Even if you tell me to come... how the heck am I supposed to get all the way to the Empress on my own... Damn it!”

Each and every one of the royal guards carried armed might and technical prowess, but since their primary duty was to act bodyguards, they were lacking in real combat experience. Also, the magic that they used were limited to military assault and healing spells. With Glen’s wealth of experience in the past as an Imperial Court Magician and the extensive amount of spells that he knew, as long as he devoted himself to running away, he would probably manage somehow.

However, trying to invade an area was a different matter altogether.

With the difference in numbers, there was a despairingly large difference in combat potential.

Not to mention, the bodyguard that would be positioned closest to the Empress was probably the royal guard commander Zeros. In the God-Reverence War forty years ago, he had fought evenly against the general of the Holy Elizareth Church’s Knights of the Chapel, the ‘Sword Saint’ Johannes, and was indisputably a mighty veteran. His abilities couldn’t be compared to his peers.

No matter how I think about it this is beyond what I can do. I need allies... if I at least had one or two allies—

As Glen hit the wall in frustration, it was then that—

He felt a chill down his spine. It was a deathly chill that felt as though a blade of ice had been run across his back.

“—Bloodthirst!?”

This all too familiar sensation made Glen reflexively turn towards its source.

On the roof of a building stood a boy-girl duo. The duo were undoubtedly looking straight down towards Glen.

Glen recognized the distinct clothing and figures of the two.

The two, who had risen from the depths of his sea of memories, were—

“Riel!? And Albert too!? Why are you— No way, could it be that the Imperial Court Magicians were also mobilized!?”

The moment Glen noticed their presence—

Riel kicked off the roof like a bullet and ran down the walls the nearby buildings.

The moment she touched the ground, she began saying something and pressed her hands against the floor.

Then, sparks of lightning burst from the ground, in mere moments a cross shaped claymore came forth from Riel’s hands. In exchange, the stone paving beneath her arms disappeared.

Riel, who had made a steel claymore from the stone pavement, readied the blade on her shoulder, and charged towards Glen—

“Tch! Your specialty alchemy combination of [Phenotype Transformation] and [Elemental Rearrangement] for high speed weapon synthesis already!? And it’s friggin’ fast!”

As usual, there was no time to be surprised by their skill.

There was no doubt about this; as of now, Riel and Albert – Glen’s former comrades – were enemies. Like the royal guards, they had come to hunt them down.

A despairing sense of fretfulness seemed to burn at Glen. He never thought that of all people, they would—

“Stop damnit! If you don’t stop then I’m gonna have to take you down!”

However, Riel, unfazed by Glen’s threat, and continued to rush forward.

The space between them was closing in an instant—

“—<Oh frost wolf of silver · With a cloak of blizzard · Burst forth>-!”

Glen completed the three-stage chant without hesitation.

In the next moment, a swirl of frost gathered in the palm of Glen’s outstretched left hand. The resulting blizzard became a frozen tempest that caused the temperature to rapidly decline.

The overwhelming frost caused the moisture in the air to freeze into abundant amount of ice shards, which flooded towards Riel.

The black magic [Ice · Blizzard] was a military grade assault spell. If one were to be struck by the blizzard without any magical safeguards, their blood would freeze in an instant, and their heart would be stopped. Furthermore, the impact of the countless number of ice shards would cause the frozen body to shatter into small pieces.

Normally, one would come to a halt before the blizzard. Magicians whom were experienced in combat would immediately raise a magical safeguard and retreat away from its area of effect. Either way, they would stop.

Despite this, Riel did not. Ignoring the tempest and unafraid of the shards of ice that struck her, she raised her arms to protect her eyes and continued to madly rush forward.

“Are you a friggin’ pig or something—!?”

The blizzard’s low temperatures were resisted using the black magic [Tri · Resist], but there was no way for Riel to defend against physical attacks from the ice shards that flew towards her. For her to be able to push through was nothing but a testament to her unusual tenacity, which one would not be able to gauge from her appearance and idiocy.

“Lumia-! Get down-!”

Clicking his tongue, Glen threw away the robe that hung on his shoulders, and began to chant another spell.

What he casted was the black magic [Weapon · Enchant], which imbued his fists with magic power. Engaging that girl in close combat barehanded would simply be asking to die—

“Haiiiiiiiyaaaa—!”

As Glen finished the chant, Riel, who dashed forth like a gale, had reached striking distance. In nearly the same instant, she raised her claymore above her head.

Then, she swung her sword downwards.

The resulting strike was like a flash of lightning.

It was a decisive, straightforward, rough, yet elegant strike.

“Tch—!?”

Glen crossed his fists above his head to meet the severe blow.

Just where did Riel find such brute strength in her small arms?

The moment Glen received the strike, overwhelming shockwaves that seemed like they would crush his body burst from the clash, and the pavement beneath his feet was crushed.

“Gg—AAAHHH—!?”

Throwing up blood, Glen resisted the strike with all his strength so that he would not be crushed.

“Sensei-!”

“I’ve been waiting for this moment, Glen!”

Riel pulled her sword back and swung it down again. The claymore, which should’ve

been considerably heavy, was swung around like a willow branch, and flashed towards Glen twice, thrice, and again without a moment's rest.

The thunderous blast of each swing was accompanied by the sound of the air being torn.

“Tch—!?”

Glen ducked left, right, and back to narrowly avoid the steel tempest. Sparks would fly whenever he parried the blade with the back of his hands, which shone with magical energy. However, the force of the unstoppable impact would crash into his body, and the tremendous force behind the blade would cause a gale to violently blow in all directions, tormenting his protesting body.

“Iiiiiiiiyaaaa—!”

With a lion-like roar, Riel continued to swing again and again.

The aftershock of each strike would gash the walls, pulverize the pavement, and send the resulting wreckage flying through the air. In the brief engagement the alleyway had already been reduced to a hellish landscape.

Riel's visage of unadulterated force and violence was akin to a tornado.

“Guh—!? H-, Hey wait-! Riel! Can you just listen to me for a bit-!?”

“There's no point! Kill!”

No matter what Glen said, all he would get in reply were vicious strikes.

Shit... Shit...! Albert is behind her—!

On a faraway rooftop, the young man gazed up the situation with eyes that were sharp like a hawk, patiently waiting for his chance to strike. The mere sight of the man pushed Glen's uneasiness to its limit.

Albert was a master at magic sniping. Even in the midst chaotic battle, he would be able to avoid hitting his allies and snipe his enemies with unparalleled accuracy. It could be called a superhuman feat. Furthermore, he was capable of ‘Double · Cast’, a high level magic technique which allowed one to activate a magic twice with a single

chant.

Shit, my original magic [The Fool's World] doesn't work against these guys—!

Executor #17 of the Imperial Court Magicians Special Forces, 'The Star', Albert.

From the same unit, Executor #7, 'The Chariot', Riel.

The genius magician who could snipe from outside the effect radius of [The Fool's World], Albert.

The genius magic swordsman which rendered [The Fool's World] meaningless with her mastery of close combat, Riel.

When Glen had been known as Executor #0, 'The Fool', during his time with the Imperial Court Magicians, they were the most reliable comrades he could ask for— At the same time, however, they were also the worst enemies he could possibly face.

"How is it Glen!? This is the power of my magic!"

"Can you even call that magic!?"

Glen shouted as he rolled to the side to dodge a sweeping slash which destroyed the wall behind him.

"Of course it's magic! I used alchemy to make this sword!"

Pushing her body to her limits, Riel flew towards Glen and brought down her claymore in an exaggerated overhand strike.

The claymore barely missed Glen, who had managed to jump away, and demolished the stone pavement where he was a moment ago, blasting away fragments and leaving a crater in its wake.

"And I shall firmly reject your explanation!"

Despite the seemingly playful rebuttal, Glen had no room to play around.

At the corner of the vision, he could see Albert pointing his finger towards him.

Impossible. Dodging Albert's 'Double Cast' sniping whilst fighting Riel at the same time was far within the range of impossibility. It was simply beyond the scope of a human's capabilities.

Furthermore, Riel, who pursued Glen like a hunting dog, showed not even the slightest trace of fatigue.

He was completely out of options.

Damnit, sorry Lumia—!

Slipping past the tempest of destruction, Glen helplessly clenched his teeth—

At the same time, Albert released the black magic [Lightning · Pierce] from the time of his finger—

The supersonic beam of lightning shot through the air in a straight line in Glen's direction—

Ku—!?

With no way to dodge, Glen prepared himself for the worst—

“Kyan!?”

The black magic [Lightning · Pierce] struck the back of Riel's head.

Riel quickly fell to the floor, and where her body began to twitch and spasm.

“...Eh?”

The seemingly endless chorus of destruction quickly came to a halt. It was almost as if it had all been a joke.

As Glen stood shocked, Albert who jumped from the roof lightly landed on the floor.

“It's been a while, Glen.”

“Ah, Ahh...”

The calm and condescending tone of voice behind his former comrade's greeting made Glen feel a little perplexed.

"Let's go somewhere else. Follow me."

Albert, dragging Riel behind him, walked deeper down the alley.

Unable to understand the situation, Glen and Lumia exchanged a glance and obediently nodded.

Then—

"You stupid idiot! What the heck were you thinking!?"

Glen's shout reverberated from deep within an alleyway at the western area of Fejiti.

"You wanted to settle a score from all the way back when I was still in active duty!? Think about time and circumstance a little idiot! Musclebrain! Thanks to you I almost friggin' died!"

"...Mm"

The force behind the [Lightning · Pierce] that had struck Riel had been substantially controlled, and her natural tenacity had also lightened the impact. She had already recovered by now, and her emotional state returned to its usual meager state. That said, she seemed to be a little dispirited.

"S-, Sensei... Who are they?"

Lumia stayed a little further away, and looked uneasily at Riel and Albert.

"Ah, these guys are my comrades from back when I was still in the army. We can trust them, so rest easy... or at least I think we can. After what happened just now..."

"Yep. Using military assault magic in the middle of town... That was careless of you Albert. I mean look, even that girl is scared of—"

"It's your fault isn't it? Your fault!"

Glen clawed Riel's head in his hands, and violently shook her back and forth.

"...Geez, you haven't changed in the least... hah..."

Ignoring Riel, who maintained her sleepy-looking expressionlessness whilst dizzily shaking back and forth like a metronome, Glen released a long sigh.

"...Can we get back on topic? As it stands, the current situation is rather grave."

"S-, Sorry, keep going."

Despite reuniting with Glen after a long time, Albert's attitude was still rather cold. Due to this, Glen replied in an uneasy manner.

"From the information that I've gathered with my farsight magic, Her Majesty the Empress is currently being detained by the Royal guard. The royal guard are moving independently to eliminate that girl – Miss Lumia – over there."

"Yeah I get that. Those guys got an order that the Empress would never ever give. So, what's her situation right now?"

"The Empress is currently at the V.I.P. stands. However, all the core elites of the royal guards are stationed around her perfectly, so there aren't any openings to exploit. From the looks of it, the Empress is unable to move elsewhere either. Anyone who gets remotely close will be met with hostility... so it would rather difficult to break through."

"What about Serika? You know, the former #21."

"She is currently next to the Empress, however, she doesn't appear to be planning anything."

"I just don't get it. Given Serika, there's no way she wouldn't be able to protect the Empress and break through the encirclement... Anyway, do you get why the royal guard are targeting Lumia?"

"I don't know the details. However, if what you said is true, that Miss Lumia is the rumored 'Abandoned Princess'... Then let's say that the royal guard heard about this. To protect the royal family's honor, they would run rampant out of loyalty, and eliminate her... I suppose that is a possibility."

“But aren’t they going a little too far? There’s a saying that says ‘the truth is bound to leak eventually’, so let’s assume they somehow got ahold of this confidential information. Even then, they don’t have to do this while the Empress is still here, and there isn’t a solid reason to do this right now. I just don’t get why the royal guards are going so far as to commit Lèse-majesté themselves to get this done.”

“You make a fair point. If the royal guards needed to do this, it would’ve been better to do this in secret.”

As the two thought about the truth behind the incident, Glen showed a gloomy expression, whilst Albert maintained his calm indifference.

When the two seemed to reach a standstill in their thoughts, Riel suddenly butted in.

“That’s enough. There are things that you wouldn’t understand no matter how much you think about it.”

“...No, wouldn’t it be better if you used your head a little more?”

“That’s why I thought of a plan to break through this situation. If you’re here, Glen, we can pull off a slightly more advanced strategy.”

“Oh? Let’s hear it then.”

“First, I will charge in from the front. Then, Glen will charge in from the front. After that, Albert will charge in from the front. Everything should be fine that way... What do you think?”

“Can you stop thinking with your muscles already!?”

“Ow.”

Glen, who was shocked and astonished, clutched Riel’s head from both sides, and grinded his palms against her head like a turning screw.

“Do you understand the hardships I’m going through now that you’re gone, Glen?”

The words that Albert said in a matter-of-fact tone seemed to bite at Glen.

“...Mhm, sorry. I’m really sorry.”

“Now is not the time to listen to why you left us without saying anything, nor is it the time to ask you to come back, however... I will have you explain it all to us someday. It is something you must see through to the end.”

“...Mhm.”

Towards this, Glen, in rare circumstance, nodded obediently.

“And then, you will settle the score with me someday. It is something you must see through to the end.”

“No way in hell!”

Towards Riel, who refused to give up, Glen rebutted in a fed-up manner.

“Right. I don’t want to settle the score someday either. Then, how about right now—”

“Why do you see it like that!? Give me a break already! Hiiii!? S-, Stay away!”

Riel readied the giant sword, and drew closer with an expressionless stare.

Glen sweat like a waterfall as he fearfully shifted backwards.

“Anyway, why are you so fixated with fighting me!?”

“In a duel between magicians, the loser must heed a request from the winner... I heard.”

“Ah, so there was a molding tradition like that!? And what about it!?”

“...That’s...”

Hearing Glen’s desperate and somewhat resigned question, Riel was at a loss of words for a brief moment.

“...It’s because... more than anything ... I want you to come back... Glen.”

Although she didn’t usually show emotion, for the brief moment where mutters were nearly drowned out, there was a slightly sorrowful undertone behind her voice... or so it seemed.

“...Tch, you idiot. If I die ‘cause of that then aren’t you just putting the cart before the horse...?”

“Glen won’t die so easily.”

“Are you serious...”

Lumia, who silently observed the situation thus far, let a chuckle slip.

“Albert-san and Riel-san... right? Hehe, they’re both good people aren’t they?”

“Huh? Good people? These guys? You’ve got to be kidding me...”

At this point, Glen couldn’t help but sigh.

“Well anyway, if we can directly meet the Empress, we should be able to break through this situation. For one reason or another, I have to get to where the Empress is.”

“Why is that, Glen?”

“Who knows? That’s what Serika said anyway. What she said was not really music to the ears, but she wouldn’t say that without a good reason. There has to be a reason why I must get to the Empress. Since the situation gonna turn worse if we sit around doing nothing, why don’t we give this a try?”

“Can we trust her?”

“Well at the very least, I know I can trust her.”

“...Alright. If you say so, then I will put my trust in her too.”

Albert silently closed his eyes and nodded.

“To get you two to the Empress... what should we do?”

“Hmm, I wonder—”

Glen thought about it for a brief moment... and returned a certain suggestion to Albert and Riel.

CHAPTER 5

FERVENT OUTSIDE, TURBULENT INSIDE

The fervor in the stadium showed no signs of dying down. Rather, dramatic developments that did not allow the spectators to put their minds at ease happened one after another, driving the stadium into a state of wild enthusiasm.

“...What’s taking so long?” murmured Sistina.

In contrast to the lively crowd, she was feeling uneasy.

“Has he still not found Lumia?”

A fair amount of time had passed since the afternoon events began. Even with Glen missing, the students of class two struggled as hard as they could and managed to keep their rank from plummeting any further from fourth place. However, given that the class’ aim was to win, they now found themselves in a rough situation. Without a leader at their helm, the difference in raw ability was starting to show.

“As expected, without sensei here...”

The class’ morale plummeted without Glen’s presence. ‘I don’t think we can do it. We can’t win without him.’...Such sentiments permeated through the air. Even Sistina herself was getting trapped in thoughts such as ‘We had fun’ and ‘We tried our best...’

“Just where did those two go... Ah, he’s not doing anything indecent to Lumia is he?”

Sistina grew frustrated and angry at her helpless ignorance.

Then, sensing a presence of someone behind her, she quickly turned around.

“Took you long enough! You’re late as hell sen— H-, Huh?”

She thought it had been Glen and Lumia, but her eyes fixated on an unfamiliar boy-girl duo instead.

One was a young man with long hair who carried a piercing hawk-like gaze.

The other was a doll-like girl with blue-hair, a color rarely seen in the empire, whose bearings bore no resemblance of emotion.

The two each wore a black-themed suit and cravat with a pair of white gloves, a combination widely recognized as the empire's formal wear. Although the attire seemed rather formal for the occasion, it wasn't particularly rare or special. For some reason though, the attire felt slightly out of place.

"You guys are class two right?"

"Y-, Yes... b-, but who are you people...?"

"I'm an old friend of Glen Ryders, Albert. The girl with me is Riel."

"....."

Sistina's question was answered by the young man who called himself Albert. The girl who was introduced as Riel speechlessly lowered her head in what appeared to be a greeting.

"We were invited to the academy by Glen to supposedly rekindle our old friendships after the festivities today. Of course, we have entry passes.

Albert then retrieved a card that bore a silver-print of the academy's owl emblem from his chest-pocket. It was a magic talisman that was distributed to official guests of the academy after a strict inspection, and allowed its bearer to pass freely through the barrier surrounding the academy.

"However, it seems that he had some sudden business to attend to."

The students of class two began chattering amongst themselves in response to the sudden visitors.

"...While the abruptness of this news may be troubling, it seems that he will not be able to return for a while, so he has entrusted this class to me. Thus, I will be taking over as the leader of this class from hereon. Now then—"

In a corner of the town a large distance away from the academy—

A young man wholeheartedly ran whilst carrying a blonde-haired girl in his arms.

He recalled the conversation he had moments ago with a former colleague.

<TL Note: To clear any confusion, the following is all said by GLen.>

“Lumia is an emotion amplifier, but in order to break through this situation, we can’t use her powers.”

“Well, you should understand this already, but if her identity as a supernatural is discovered then we’ll never see the end of it. She’ll be persecuted, loathed, and if we make a misstep in further political matters, executed. If the news of her being a supernatural is spread, then the unofficial weaponized orders will come out of the woodwork to purge her under the god’s name. It’s game over if we catch their attention.”

“So on top of having to hide Lumia’s real identity, we can’t use her powers, and we won’t get the chance to explain the situation to anybody either. In this kind of sticky situation, the only way we can get to the Empress unobstructed is if my class wins the Magic Games Festival.”

“This time around, the winning class’ instructor, as the representative of the class, will receive their medal directly from the Empress. Given the strict security around the Empress right now, this will likely be our only chance to get past the royal guards and come into contact with her.”

“That’s ‘cause for the brief moment that the festival ends and the Empress stands on winner’s podium, the royal guard will have no choice but to release her from their thorough supervision. If they prevent her from bestowing the medals to a commoner in the name of the Empress, then the Empress’ authority and honor will be damaged. Given the pride that the royal guards have as a right-wing faction, they definitely won’t do such a thing.”

“So I have an idea to get close to her without being suspected, that’s—”

-----.

--To be honest, this is a steep gamble.

However, it's true that we have no choice but to play this hand to break through this

situation.

“Found them—!” an angry voice called from behind.

Without slowing down, he took a fleeting glimpse behind himself—

“There they are—! After them—!”

He saw a group of royal guards at the crossroad a fair distance behind him.

I can't be caught here.

“...Hmpf, what a bother.”

Exhaling briefly through his nose, he picked up the pace—

“You'll take over... and help us win...? But why?”

Sistina and the other members of class two could not hide their doubts regarding the man named Albert, who claimed to be Glen's old friend.

Just who is this guy anyway? Well, the academy has a barrier that prevents any outsiders from getting in. So, given that this guy has an official entry pass, he should at least be trustworthy...

As Sistina tried to come to a judgment, the small statured girl standing next to the man who introduced himself as Albert walked up to Sistina and clasped Sistina's hands in hers.

“...Please believe in us.”

Sistina peered into the girl's eyes from a distance where they could feel each other's breaths.

Then, she turned her eyes back and forth between the man and the girl.

“You two are...”

As if to reorganize her thoughts, Sistina fell silent for a brief moment. Then she said, “...Alright. I will leave the command and supervision of our class to you, Albert-san.”

With this announcement, Sistina became the focus of her class’ bewilderment.

“It’ll be fine, I think we can trust these two. Even with a different person in command, we’ll still be doing what we can to win right? Everyone wants to win right?”

‘That’s right’, the students exchanged glances with one another as if to share this sentiment.

“I don’t know what the heck Glen-sensei is doing right now, but...”

Sistina took a fleeting glance at Albert for a brief moment, and announced to her classmates.

“We’ve gotten this far already, so let’s win! We’ve gotten this far thanks to sensei haven’t we!? Aren’t we just a teensy bit away!? It’s too early to call it quits!”

“U-, Uhuh...”

“Well about that Sistina...”

“Without sensei... we...”

Sistina tried to rouse up her classmates, who had given her a weak response.

“You know... if we give up just because that guy isn’t around, I’m certain that he’s going to be all like ‘Gyahahahah! You guys are totally useless without me aren’t you! Ah right~, big sorry you guys, for dropping out midway~ Teehee ☆’ or something like that...”

Clink, Clack, Crack—

Acknowledging that such a development was possible, the classmates’ emotions were set alight.

“That would be irritating... That would most certainly be irritating...”

“Even if that’s all that that idiot says, I won’t be able to endure the shame...”

“Ah, shit! I feel angry just thinking about it! Alright, let’s do this then!”

The extinguished fire was reignited.

“...This should be fine I guess.”

Sistina, who had succeeded in riling up the class, sent another fleeting glance towards Albert.

“Now then, let’s see what you can do, Al-ber-t-san?”

In response to her taunting, the man could only grimace and scratch his head.

“It’s about time for the Magic Games Festival to go into full swing! Class two put up a good fight in the first half, but are they already out of gas—!?”

Like before, an energetic voice was broadcasted throughout the whole stadium.

“Next up is ‘Transform’—! If class two drops the ball, then they can kiss their hopes of victory goodbye! Now then, what will class two do in this dire situation—!”

“U-, Umm...”

Next to the circular stage set-up in the contest field of the stadium, in a standby test for contestants awaiting their turn, Rin anxious grasped the sides of her uniform’s skirt and trembled out of nervousness.

“If I lose... Then the class will... our class will lose...”

“WOOO—OOOAAAAHHHH!?”

Rin jumped in surprise from commentator’s sudden outburst and the following applause.

“Setah from Harry-sensei’s class one has transformed into an impressive

dragon—!? Amazing!”

Rin fearfully turned her eyes towards the stage. Standing there was a creature with scales that gleamed with black luster, wings that were broad and mighty, fangs that glowed with sinister light, and a massive figure that seemed like it would crush anything in its path. The pressure exerted by the creature was so great that it seemed like it could be mistaken for the real deal.

“Hyii—!?”

In reflexively cowered away from the frightening figure.

“The judges have given high scores across the board! 9, 9, 10, 9... for a total of 37 points! Has the winner been decided—!?”

“W-, Wahah... W-, What should I do...”

As Rin reached her wit’s end and her face began to pale, someone grasped her shoulder from behind.

“G-, Glen-sense—”

Turning her head around—

“I mean... A-, Albert-san...”

Standing there was the mysterious young man who had introduced himself as Glen’s friend, Albert.

“Ah... U-, Uhhh... I’m so sorry... I made a mistake...”

“It seems you’ve done quite a bit of image training haven’t you?”

Albert had turned his eyes towards the collection of holy artworks that Rin hugged to her chest.

“Eh? Ah-, yes... Glen-sensei told me to...”

“Then you shouldn’t have any problems.”

Albert vigorously nodded his head.

“You were called Rin right? You’ll be fine. I’m sure you’re far more excellent than you think you are. The only problem I see is that you seem to be lacking a bit in terms of confidence. I hear from that guy Glen all the time that thinks that you have genuine ability.”

“Albert...-san?”

“Don’t fret too much if it doesn’t work out. Even if I said that we gotta win, this is still a festival. No one’s gonna die from this, and no one will complain either. If we happen to lose and people start blaming you for it, I’ll give ‘em a good spanking, so don’t sweat it alright?”

It was as if he was taking the words out of someone else’s mouth. Rin thought to the relief and calmness that she had felt the first time she heard those words.



Taking a deep breath—

“Alright! I’ll do my best!”

Rin determinedly nodded.

“Now, next up is the slightly well-known person in the academy in regards to transformation magic, Rin-chan from class two! Just what kind of transform will she show us today—!”

“I’m going.”

Albert silently nodded, and Rin left for the stage.

“Oh? If we want to be victorious we have to win here, but then you say it’s okay to lose?” said Sistina as she watched Rin leave with a smile.

Looking at that expression, Sistina herself showed a knowing smile.

“Albert-san, you’re quite a dauntless person if I say so myself.”

“...If those above are seen to be calm, those below can act to their full potential. This is especially true for someone with her personality. Whether to scold or encourage depends on the person.”

“I see I see, you really understand quite a lot. It’s as if you’ve always known her.”

“...”

Then—

“I- It’s an angel—!? An angel has descended upon this academy as if flying out of a holy painting—! How beautiful! What a wonderful transformation Rin-chan from class two has shown us—! Now then, how do the judges think—!?”

The emerging figure had a halo that resembled the face of a clock. On her back were 3 pairs of pure-white wings. Her pure-silver hair flowed freely in the air and her lightweight silk gown bounced gently off her skin. A seemingly endless amount of golden chain coiled loosely around her delicate figure. Connected to the chains and held by her slender arms was a giant golden key, symbolizing the Angel of Time.

The beauty of the figure was akin to a precisely crafted sculpture.

It was Lahtirika, the Angel of Time.

The divine presence on the stage seemed like living proof of the angel's descent in religious tales.

Amidst the rupture of applause and cheers that captured the stadium, the devout reflexively fell to their knees and performed the sign of the cross before the majestic descent of the angel—

“Damnit, where did they go...!?”

A veteran of the royal guard, Cross Fahrus, grew impatient.

He had been given the mission of protecting the noble Empress during her visit to Fejiti and carried his role with great pride and gave it his undivided attention. However, without any precedent nor notice, he had been ordered to execute a certain girl by Zeros. He had also been courteously provided a monochrome picture of the girl.

Just when did Zeros prepare such a picture? Also, the fact that they were to execute her immediately after her capture was also strange. Even if the girl was guilty of Lèse-majesté and was a traitor to the nation, the methodology through which the punishment was carried out was unnatural enough to be conspicuous.

Although this was a truly distasteful mission for Cross, he had been put in charge of it, and so he began to pursue the girl and the man who was escaping with her. A considerable amount of time had passed since the chase began.

Cross had split his team into tens of units to search through the vicinity of Fejiti. Then, the unit led by Cross had spotted the aforementioned girl being carried by a man as the two continued to run.

They had already contacted the local authorities ahead of time and sealed off all the walls of Fejiti.

The duo were nothing more than birds trapped in a large cage.

Actually, Cross team were already progressively going about their capture.

After all, their capture was a merely a matter of time.

Or at least it should have been, but—

We can't catch them. Regardless of how close we get, we haven't been able to even touch them.

I've coordinated to the other units spread out throughout Fejiti using the magic tool, set up an encirclement, and continued our pursuit, yet they always somehow manage to precisely choose the correct path and break through the weakest part of the encirclement. North, East, Center, South, West— they've run rampant all over the place. We're practically on a wild goose chase at this point.

It's like had a bird-eye eye view of the town. They have a complete grasp of both the structure of the town and our movements. It even feels like our communications are being tapped somehow.

What I don't get is that the second we lose sight of them, they suddenly pop up in front of us again. It's like they're playing around.

“Damnit... Are you looking down on us...!”

Alongside his colleagues, Cross continued to feverishly chase after the man tens of steps away—

--.

----.

“After getting the highest possible score in the ‘Transform’, it seems that class two is back in business! With their equally great performance in ‘Familiar Control’ and ‘Investigate & Unlock’, they have climbed up to third place and are now in prime position to win! My, this Magic Games Festival is one for the books isn’t it!?”

The most heated competition is one with an uncertain result, is it not? Seeing class

two return to their earlier form, the spectator's spirits were roused up once again. Their excitement was at its peak

“With this in mind, we are now entering the climax of the traditional magic game, ‘Grazia’! Right now, Harry-sensei’s class one and Glen-sensei’s class two are trading blow-for-blow in this conquest battle!”

‘Grazia’ was played on an elliptical field where the contestants of each team would wear different color bibs to signify their affiliation. Participants would desperately chant spells to set up spirit-points, which would then be connected to create territorial boundaries. Walls of light were erected along the lines that connected the points to signify ownership of a territory, and the field would be split in a dazzling display of vivid colors—

“Supposedly, but what is class two doing! Since the beginning they haven’t made any fields! All they’re doing is destroying the opposing team’s territory fields!”

Just like the announcer said, class two ignored creating their own fields, and focused all their resources and attention to disturbing and destroying class one’s fields.

“Damn you insolent pests...! Aiming for a draw aren’t you!? You class won’t get any points, but knowing the difference in our class’ abilities, I guess that’s the best you people can hope for!”

Standing outside the field, Harry, who was commanding his team, grit his teeth in frustration.

The contest field had been forced into a stalemate. Although the contestants of class two – Alf, Vicks, and Caesar – were definitely worse than their class one counterparts, for some reason or another, they were strangely adept at destroying fields.

Thus, neither side had been able to gain any points.

Whenever class one got any points, it would almost immediately return to zero.

The final rankings were determined based on the difference in scores attained by each class in their respective matchups. The case of class two aside, if this continued any longer, class one would soon find themselves in a chasm compared too many of the other classes.

Faced with this situation, Harry lost his patience and gave his next command to the team.

“Damn it, there’s no time! In this situation— Ah right, ‘Absolute · Field’! Hurry up and make an ‘Absolute · Field’! Have these pests know the difference in our abilities!”

Hearing the instruction, the members of class two began creating a field that shone red.

This type of field took a lot more work to create compared to a normal field. Furthermore, if it was destroyed during its creation, the team that attempted it would receive a large point deduction.

“Ahh—, class one is making an ‘Absolute · Field’! If it’s completed then class two won’t be able to force a draw! Class two have hurriedly started making a ‘Normal · Field’, but as expected, class one is fast to react! Class one’s defender, Null-kun, quickly dismantled the attempt—!”

The three member of class two desperately attempted to erect a field to secure the upper hand, but class one’s defender put a wedge in their plans. At the same time, class-one’s ‘Absolute · Field’ was nearing completion.

“Fuhahahahaha—! You can try as many little tricks as you want class two, but this is checkmate! And with this victory, we will cement our place at the top! It’s over!”

As Harry triumphantly shouted his victory speech, class one’s ‘Absolute · Field’ was completed— and class one’s loss was also cemented.

“T-, This isssssssssssssssssssss—!?”

In the face of the result that defied all expectations, the stadium was filled with angry roars.

As the red field was completed, a field of yellow light suddenly appeared and enveloped it.

“‘Silent · Field · Counter’—!? What in the world!? Class two has prepared a ‘Silent · Field’ with that activates under the condition that class one completes an ‘Absolute · Field’—!”

In 'Grazia', a field that is completely surrounded is worth no points, and all the points are given to the team with the outermost field, meaning—

"N-, No way..."

Harry fell into a stupefied daze.

"A 'Silent · Field'...!? Even amongst experts, this is a high-level strategy that's hard to execute... And these small fry managed to pull it off!? On top of that, the activation requirement was an 'Absolute · Field' of this scale... It's a useless strategy that dooms the user if they make a single misstep...! What utter nonsense—"

The contestants of class one began to panic. Never in their wildest imagination would they think that their opponents, who they had thought were so much worse in terms of ability, would be able pull off such a high-level strategy, not to mention that it had created such a large point differential. In amidst the chaos, class one lost their ability to think rationally about the situation.

"—!? You idiots! What are sitting around for!? D-, Destroy it! Go and destroy it!? Just a little bit is enough, so hit the damn field—"

Then, as the referee mercilessly sounded the whistle, Harry covered his face with his palms.

"Ohh, that's time—! Who would've thought that we'd see such great comeback—! With this, class two closes the gap between them and class one, who are currently in first place—! The result is still up in the air! Class one's place in first had been all but confirmed, but this result has brought in a wildcard factor—!"

"...Alright."

Albert, who gazed upon the same field as Harry, nodded to himself.

"Wow, we actually won..."

Beside him, Sistina, who was in charge of documentation and timekeeping, stared on in amazement.

"In theory, we would lose nine times out of ten. We just managed to pull out the win on the first try."

“Even so... You’re quite amazing, Albert-san.”

“Amazing? Me? The ones who are really amazing are the ones from your class isn’t it? They managed to pull it off against much stronger opponents.”

“That’s true... but Albert-san, didn’t you give my classmates detailed instructions using hand signals throughout the event? I can understand since I’ve been keeping a record of everything; the instructions you gave were so perfect it was almost scary.”

“...Uhuh?”

“Yep, the reason they were able to pull off that counterattack is all thanks to you, Albert-san.”

“Nope.

Albert firmly denied Sistina’s praise.

“In order to make the counter work, all the members of your class worked together to modify the barrier creation spell so that it was easier to use right?”

“Huh? How did you know that?”

“...I heard from Glen. Anyway, your class’ victories belongs only to you guys and no one else. I’m only helping you guys shore up a few weaknesses.”

“Hmpf, well, if you say so, I won’t argue.”

Sistina combed her hair upwards, and showed a knowing smile.

“Now then, we’ve finally reached the finale of the Magic Games Festival! I’m up next for the highly anticipated event, ‘Duel’!”

“I see... I’ll look forward to it.”

“...-! Yes, please do!”

Sistina seemed to go blank for a moment in response to Albert’s words, but then she showed a dauntless smile.

“Hah...Hah...-! We got him! We finally have him cornered-!”

Cross confirmed his victory with ragged breaths.

The detestable man carrying that girl, without losing speed somehow, is just in front of us in this narrow back-alley. He may have used the white magic [Physical · Boost], but to be able to outpace us thus far despite our combat training is something that is deserving of praise and amazement.

However, this is the end of the road for them.

That man is running straight towards the formation that my colleagues have set up ahead of time.

“Pincer them! You may have managed to break through previously, but I won’t allow it this time-!”

In front of the escapee, several soldiers stood ready to intercept.

“Halt! If you refuse, then you leave us no choice but to display the might of our magic-!” a waiting guard warned.

Cross felt that the pursuit, which seemed to be something from a drama, would finally come to an end—

“W-, What-!?”

Carrying the girl in his arms, the man continued to recklessly charge towards the waiting group of royal guards—

“D-, Don’t say we didn’t warn you-!”

The guards simultaneously began to chant.

<Oh crimson lion · With a torrent of rage · Roar and Infuriate>-!”

The black magic [Blaze · Burst]. It was a military-grade assault spell that gathered and compressed heat energy into a fireball and fired it towards a target. Whatever it struck

would be engulfed in a fiery explosion, and anything without magical defenses would be reduced to dust. Its attributes made it an excellent suppressing spell.

It was impossible to evade such a great number of [Blaze · Burst] within the confines of the narrow alleyway. Even if [Tri · Resist] was used, the sheer volume would penetrate that defense and send the two to their graves. The black magic that returned the energies of the three elements to their natural state, [Tri · Vanish], would also be insufficient for dealing with the sheer volume. If black magic that erected a powerful magic barrier, [Force · Shield], was used, the man would have to stop moving, which meant that the two would become an offering to royal guard's blades.

All the guards believed that it was finally over, and launched the fireballs towards the man.

But then— The sturdy stone walls of the alleyway suddenly changed form as if it were clay, and formed a wall between the man and the spells launched by the guards.

Immediately after, the properties of the wall began to change. The moment the wall of stone became a wall of water, the numerous fireballs collided with the wall.

After absorbing the fireballs, the wall of water was instantly vaporized. The expanding steam gushed outwards in the narrow valley, burying soldiers' vision in its wake.

"Guwahhh—!?"

With their vision obscured, none of the guards dared to move carelessly until the scorching stream of steam receded.

Finally, when the vision cleared— the two were nowhere to be seen.

The only change was that stone wall that had been used as a catalyst to the subsequent events was now gone. The two had most likely escaped through the hole that was formed.

"Shit, what was that? ...Was that alchemy? No damn way...-! What in the world was that synthesis speed-!? How could that possibly be human!?"

It seemed like the pursuit drama would continue on.

Helpless and tired, Cross chased after the man—

--.

----.

“Now then, we’re finally reaching the end of the second year’s Magic Games Festival! Today’s final event ‘Duel’ will soon begin-! The rules will be the same as last year’s; a three-on-three team-competition tournament! Which class will be left standing at the peak!? Let’s find out!”

The participating teams were gathered on the circular battlefield in the center.

“Gathered here are the three strongest members of each class! All of them will fight a fair and square battle with the honor of their classes on the line! To add onto that, if today’s star, Glen-sensei’s class two, manages to be the last one standing in ‘Duel’, they will overtake Harry-sensei’s class one for an underdog victory! How will this turn out! I can’t wait—!?”

This event would decide everything.

Will the side that used all their member’s merits come out on top? Or will the side that sent forth their strongest grasp victory?

For better or worse, this one anticipated event would decide the ending of the second year’s Magic Games Festival—

“Now, let’s get it started. First up, for the first battle, we have class six versus class four! Both sides, please send your starter forward—!”

In contrast to the boisterous stadium, the V.I.P. stand became the set of flurry and impatience.

For a while now, soldiers had been restlessly coming and going. Whenever one entered, angry remarks were sure to fly.

“Not yet!? You still haven’t caught them-!?”

Zeros frustratedly shouted at the soldier that had come to report.

“B-, But... there’s someone helping our target escape. I apologize for repeating this, but that man is far more formidable than we expected...-!”

“You fool! Is he not just a plain magic instructor!? And yet you’re still unable to catch a single magician! Do you still consider yourself as a member of the proud royal guards!?”

“M-, My apologies!”

“After them! Do everything you can to kill lady Lumia! If we’re unable to... you understand yes!?”

“Yes sir!”

“However, your excellency, our opponent is truly powerful. I am doubtful as to whether or not we can complete the task with just our abilities. Let us reveal the truth and ask the academy for suppo—”

“We cannot!”

Zeros angrily silenced the soldier’s suggestion.

“That alone, we cannot! Have you forgotten!? Us aside, if we do that, the Empress will— We absolutely must avoid doing that!”

“R-, Right... my profuse apologies!”

“Once this comes to an end, I shall bear responsibility take my own life if I must! It doesn’t matter if I die an irredeemable mutineer to her Majesty, but we must protect her Majesty at any cost! That is why—”

The young soldier limply lowered his head.

“Your excellency is willing to go so far... I understand, we shall hurry and capture lady Lumia and the man assisting her escape.”

“I must apologize as well... for forcing such a villainous role on you. Bring a portion of her Majesty’s guards to support you if it may allow you to capture them even a moment sooner. Yes, this is all for her Majesty’s sake—”

Suddenly, the alleyway burst into crimson flames, creating a shockwave that swept over the area.

“Gaaaahhh—!?”

A soldier had caught on fire fell to the floor and rolled rapidly.

“A-, Are you alright!?”

Cross hurriedly dashed towards his colleague who had been engulfed in flames.

“I-, I’m fine... The fire wasn’t that powerful... But because of the explosion and aftershock, my arm...”

Once the fire was put out, the soldier got up from the floor with a painful groan and clutched his arm with an anguished expression.

“Damn it... it’s the black magic [Burn · Floor]... another magic trap!”

They had managed to avoid fatalities from the countless magic traps thanks to their armor which had been enchanted with [Tri · Resist], but the damage wasn’t so light that they could shrug it off either. Using healing magic one-by-one to treat wounds also ate at their magic power, resources, and time. Due to these factors, Cross’ group had to be constantly be wary of magic traps and as a result, they hadn’t been able to close the distance between them and their target.

To add onto that, their opponents weren’t placing traps at random, but rather, as the chase dragged on, their opponents seemed to wait for their patience to run thin and their guard to be lowered before taking the opportunity to set up traps. The way they did so was ingenious, if not miraculous. As a result, despite Cross’ group knowing that there were traps, they had managed to trigger the traps a countless number of times.

Cross couldn’t help but tap his feet in frustration in response to the turn of events.

“Honestly what the heck? Just who are these people that we’re chasing? They seem to be rather experienced in combat... They’ve practically been leading us by our noses this entire time! Not to mention they’re not killing us either... what the heck is happening!? Isn’t the person helping that girl escape just a magic instructor!?”

“Cross-san! More importantly, we’ve successfully made contact with unit three! Right now, those two are in East Area Second Street, advancing south towards Tortol!”

“Understood! Alright let’s move everybody!”

--.

----.

The ‘Duel’ event continued.

Lightning beams, fiery arrows, and frozen gusts flew across the dueling ring.

The fifth battle, class two versus class four—

“<Oh the great winds>-!”

Sistina completed her chant of the black magic [Gale · Blow] before her opponent could complete the counter-spell and struck her opponent with an intense gale of wind.

“U-, Ugaaah—!?”

Unable to resist, the opponent was blown away.

“Ooh!? Contestant Ridory wasn’t able to complete the [Air · Screen] spell in time—! She is out of bounds! Class two defeats class four with three consecutive wins—! They are strong without a doubt! I thought that first-up Cashew-kun would run into trouble, but this team is simply overwhelming!”

Amidst the crowd’s cheers, Sistina and Cashew exchanged a high-five.

“An overwhelming victory as expected, Sistina! Totally different from how I won through a messy fight.”

“What are you saying Cashew? A win’s a win. You did well.”

Sistina and Cashew exchanged compliments with smiles.

“Hmpf. Well I guess that was alright Sistina, but aren’t you a bit too soft? If you weren’t

so worried about injuring the opponent, you should have even less trouble winning.”

“You never change do you, Gibel...?”

The class was roused up, but Gibel alone maintained his cold, cynical, and snarky attitude. Sistina could only sigh, unamused.

“There’s no time to chit-chat you guys.”

Albert put a wedge into the team’s conflicting views.

“The next duel is starting. Pay attention to how the other contestants fight and think of how to deal with it. Also, listen closely to what I say next.

Albert turned to Cashew, and pointed to one of the contestants that was currently on the stage.

“Isaac from class seven over there will probably be your next opponent. From what I’ve observed, his [Shock · Bolt] cast speed is insanely fast. With your abilities, you won’t be able to counter it with a vanish spell. Taking this into account, you can put up [Tri · Resist] and [Force · Shield], but you’ll likely be forced funnel everything into defense.

“T-, That’s right I guess... With my abilities...”

“Stop and listen Cashew. Do not use [Force · Shield], and only use [Tri · Resist] for the first exchange. Using it more than once is forbidden.”

Cashew opened his eyes wide in surprise.

“Hmpf, another reckless command... I’ve never heard of a magic battle that forsakes defense.”

Gibel exhaled loudly from his nose and shrugged his shoulders in a mocking manner. Ignoring this, Albert continued.

“Cashew, between the three of you, you have the best athletic ability and a sturdy physique to go with it. Utilize that athleticism and stamina and find some way to withstand [Shock · Bolt]. Either way, Isaac has a habit of doing five consecutive chants, after which his mana biorhythm will be thrown out of order and you’ll have a great

opening to exploit.”

“!”

“Use [Tri · Resist] to take on the first four shots, and find some way to avoid the fifth. If you can do that, then you win. You’re a man right? You should be able to resist a little pain when it comes down to it.”

“...A-, Alright, I’ll try it!”

Cashew nodded obediently as he was taught his winning condition.

“Next is you, Gibel. Your opponent is...”

“Hmpf, don’t trouble yourself. I can do without your advice.”

“Just listen up. Your opponent is—”

Despite the curt response, Albert patiently forced his advice onto Gibel.

“...Hmm”

As Sistina looked at Albert’s profile, a sense of knowing could be felt in her gaze.

In the southern area that was filled with a variety of street stalls and stores—

Splitting apart the countless number of pedestrians, Cross’ group rendezvoused with the other two units.

“Damn, they’ve disappeared into the night-time crowd...! What about over there!?”

A colleague quickly replied to Cross’ shout.

“I don’t see them! My apologies!”

“There’s no other way, declare martial law in this area and drive the civilians ou—”

As Cross shouted orders to his colleagues—

“Gyaa-!?”

One of the gathered soldiers’ bodies rapidly convulsed, and then he fell to the floor with a scream.

“What!? What happened!?”

“W-, We’re being sniped!”

“What did you say!?”

As Cross trembled in shock, a beam of [Lightning · Pierce] flew past his vision. The beam, along with the many that soon followed, flew in an arc to strike his colleagues one after another.

“Gyaaah-!?”

“Guahah!?”

Bzzt. As flashes of electricity burst from the soldier’s bodies, the area soon became a stage for an ensemble of screams—

“What the hell!? Are they serious!? They’re magic-sniping through this crowd!? Ku-! Hurry and spread apart! Find some cover to hide behind!”

Realizing they were being sniped, the guards frantically spread apart and jumped behind alleyways and buildings for cover.

“Tch, what’s happening!? Our equipment should be reinforced with a [Tri · Resist] enchantment... We shouldn’t be getting taken out in one hit...-!”

“A-, About that, it seems like this area is under the effect of a [Dispel · Force] field... At some point, it neutralized the enchantments placed on our equipment!”

“Have we played into their hands again...!? Damn it! Give me a sitrep!”

“Four have been hit! However, it seems that they’ve held back as far as the force goes! Our fallen allies have lost consciousness after being shot in the leg, but their lives aren’t in any danger! No civilians have been caught in the crossfire!”

“Ku... They’re only targeting us huh... Not to mention, they’ve haven’t killed any of us either... Just who are they...”

The sudden collapse of the soldiers caused the plaza to fall into chaos. People panickedly surged in all directions as they tried to escape the scene. The commotion would undoubtedly suppress the movements of the guards.

If this is what they were aiming for— Cross couldn’t help but tremble in fear in face of his opponent’s frightening skill in magic sniping and their ability to calculate the outcome of the situation.

“It cannot be helped! Units three and four guide the civilians to shelter and pass on the order for martial law! Unit two go heal the collapsed! Unit five, we’ve figured out where the sniping is coming from! Go and pursue them!”

“Roger!”

Once the orders were given out, the royal guards set off to perform their duties—

--.

----.

“After eliminating class five and defeating class eight, class two have climbed their way to the finals—!”

Cheers erupted from the crowd. The excitement in the stadium was at its peak.

“Their opponents— As if by some twist of fate, are their fated adversaries, Harry-sensei’s class one! This will be a direct face-off between the classes! Whichever class takes home the victory here will also become the victors of this year’s Magic Games Festival! Well, despite all the twist and turns, the endgame has turned out to be quite a simple—!”

The development that everyone was hoping for was now unraveling before their eyes.

However, in contrast to the rest of the stadium, a certain corner permeated a heavy mood.

That being, the V.I.P. stands of the stadium.

Surrounded by several elite guards, Alicia bore an expression of prayer as she said softly—

“Please, my lord... I beg you... Please protect that girl.”

Alicia seemed to get increasingly haggard with each passing moment. Serika, who sat next to her, murmured apologetically.

“Sorry. I let such a thing happen right under my nose... Damn it.”

“...Serika, it’s not your fault... To start with, this was because I...”

“There’s still hope though.”

Serika cast her gaze downwards towards the stage, where Sistina’s group of three and Albert, who was in charge of strategy and instruction, were.

“...Have some faith in Glen. If it’s him... he’ll surely find some way to get through this.”

“Glen... you said?”

“Yep, wasn’t he always this sort of guy even back then?”

Alicia contemplated for a brief moment, and then vigorously nodded.

“You’re right, if it’s him... If it’s him then surely...”

The finals of the ‘Duel’ event.

This intensity of the match did not betray its stakes.

First round: Class two’s Cashew vs. Class one’s Enna. As both sides fought to the best of their ability in an close extended match, Eina managed to complete the alchemy spell [Paralyzing Mist Field] to immobilize Cashew, resulting in his defeat by a narrow margin. The score was 0-1.

Continuing to the second round: Class two’s Gibel vs. Class one’s Kreiss. Both seemed evenly matched at first, but as time went on the difference in abilities began to show.

Gibel summoned an ice elemental using the spell [Call · Elemental], which then captured Kreiss using its two arms. Kreiss then surrendered. The score was 1-1.

All the stakes fell to the deciding round, where the general of each class, Class two's Sistina and Class one's Heinkel, would clash.

<TL Note: In team competitions in Japan, namely kendo, the 'general' (daishou) is referred to as the last member to compete, and is often the strongest of the team. 'general battle' is thus referred to as the final match.>

"...Nicely done, Gibel."

Sistina congratulated Gibel, who returned to the standby area with a carefree expression.

"Hmpf, I've returned the score to a tie. I hope you don't mess this up."

"At least say 'the rest is up to you'... You are always so insensitive."

Sistina pressed on her temple, unimpressed.

"...Sorry Sistina. If I won earlier, this would already be over..." Cashew regretfully grumbled.

"Well, for a poor student, your performance was satisfactory... Just leave the rest to our general."

"Yeah yeah. Geez, why do you have to be like that...?"

Sistina lightly bit back at Gibel, who continued to run his mouth, and headed towards the stage.

As Sistina left, Albert briefly said.

"...The rest is up to you."

Without turning to face Albert, Sistina outstretched her right arm horizontally, and gave a thumbs up.

Then, carrying the hopes of her entire class, she stepped onto the dueling field.

The cheers of her classmates reached her from the stands.

Before her was her opponent in this clash between generals, Heinkel.

Heinkel, as an excelling student who was comparable to Sistina, often competed against her for the class year's first seat. If the match came down the magical prowess alone, the odds of winning were about 50-50.

--Please win.

Sistina thought back to Albert's words.

--Please believe in us.

Sistina thought back to Riel's words.

"...Geez, why do they have to be so indirect... Well, fine. I'll just do it then!"

Bam, Sistina struck a fist against her palm to pump herself up. Then, she removed the glove on her left hand.

Both sides abided to the formalities of traditional magic duels, and then—

"Let the general battle begin—!"

Sistina and Heinkel made their move immediately as the round started.

"<Oh the thunder spirit's lightning>-!"

Heinkel swiftly cast [Shock · Bolt].

"<Calamity shall hence disperse>-!"

Sistina immediately followed with [Tri · Vanish] to neutralize her opponent's spell.

The remaining magic energy of the spells burst in the center of the field.

In that moment, both parties started to move around the circle while maintaining their distance.

"<Oh the great winds>-!"

"<Oh wall of air>-!"

Both continued to chant as they ran. The tempest brought forth by Sistina's [Gale · Blow] crashed into Heinkel's enclosure of air. The resulting force sent gusts flying all across the stadium.

In their first bout, the two were evenly matched—

"Do your best—! Don't you dare lose Sistina!"

"It's all yours! Keep going—!"

The classmates above cheered.

"Damn you class two! To think that you would hang on this long—! Heinkel, finish them! Losing to such a conglomeration of small fry will be a stain on your life as a magician! Anyway, just win—!" Harry hysterically shouted.

"OOOOH, both sides do your best—!"

"Good! Go get 'em!"

The crowd's spirits were fired up from this amateur magic battle.

The Magic Games Festival of ups and downs seemed like it would soon come to an end—

"<Oh crimson flame field>-!"

Heinkel cast the spell [Fire · Wall], creating a radial wall of fire that expanded explosively.

"<Divine protection of the guards>-!"

Sistina countered with [Tri · Resist] and stepped aside. The blazing tempest brushed against her body, causing her hair and coat to blow intensely.

"<Return to P—"

Heinkel immediately responded by chanting [Dispel · Force] in an attempt to nullify Sistina's [Tri · Resist]—

"<Brighten>!"

However, Sistina managed to complete the chant for [Flash · Light] a moment faster.

A flash of light exploded in the air, and the stage was dyed white.

To avoid damage to his eyes, Heinkel turned his eyes away, which delayed the activation of [Dispel · Force]. Sistina avoided the blazing tempest—

"<Oh storm of white winter>--!"

And chanted the black magic [White · Out]. The spell would fire an icy shock wave that could immobilize its target by stealing away the limb's sense of touch. Vision was limited to the whiteness of the frosty air—

"<Oh the great winds>--!"

However, Heinkel shrewdly countered with [Gale · Blow]— The intense gale overcame the icy shock-wave in the clash of forces, and swept up Sistina's body—

"Ku... <The balance shall hence sink rightward>--"

As she was blown off her feet by the wind, Sistina used the black magic [Gravity · Control] to increase her weight temporarily in a desperate attempt to bring herself back to the ground.

She used her arms to cover her eyes, and lowered her center of gravity in order to resist the gale. Her prided long, silver hair, which had been tousled by the wind, violently fanned behind her—

He's strong—

Although she was astonished by Heinkel's chanting speed, magic power, and decision making, she continued to carefully regulate her mental state and her mana biorhythm—

"<Oh the thunder spirits' lightning>-!"

As Heinkel broke through the white field and came into her vision, Sistina immediately pointed her index finger towards him and fired a bolt of lightning, which pierced straight through the wind—

“T-, This intensity of this showdown is beyond all expectations—! Both contestants refuse to yield a single step!”

Countless assault and counter spells were exchanged without reserve.

The duel only allowed spells with low lethality that the students were taught, but the deftness of the offense and defense had departed from the realm of mere students. A match of this caliber couldn't be seen very often.

“<Come · Winged servant of fire · Fulfill our contract>--!”

“<Return · To where you must be · Abandon that contract>--!”

A seemingly endless amount of spells were ceaselessly cast.

The spectators who, without exception, watched this match with cheers and exception, gulped as battle continued on—

“You’ve may have given us a hard time till now, but now you have nowhere to run scoundrel!”

Cross and his colleague rushed down a narrow alleyway, believing that victory was within their grasp.

“I’ll admit that your use of magic and your sniping ability are outstanding... But revealing your sniping position was your fault! You’ve exposed your location! You’re not getting away this time!”

“Cross-san! Unit one, seven, eight, and nine have arrived at their designated points, and are now converging towards the target along the assigned route!”

“Is that so!? Good! With this, we’ve eliminated all their possible escape routes from their sniping position. They are no more than cornered rats!”

It's over. It's finally over.

With this conviction, Cross and his colleagues triumphantly traversed the complicated alleyways, and arrived at an empty area surrounded by buildings on all sides—

“Wha...”

They stood there in astonishment.

Before them, there was nothing but a dimly-lit wasteland that was teeming with weeds. It was far detached from the hustle and bustle of the town. There were not even stray cats, much less people in this area.

“Hm!? Cross’ fifth unit!?”

“What happened!? Where is the enemy!?”

“What is this absurdity!? Are you saying they got away!?”

“That shouldn’t be possible—!? All the escape routes were covered—”

Seeing no traces of their enemy, the soldiers fell into disarray.

Ignoring his panicked colleagues, Cross noticed something awry in this area.

Namely, the four walls that surrounded this empty space.

It was covered all over—with something odd.

“...Mirrors?”

I can feel the traces of magic power. This is probably the product of alchemy.

The shape-transforming alchemy technique, [Phenotype Transformation] was probably used to make parts of the wall into flat surfaces. The trait-alter technique, [Elemental Rearrangement] was likely applied after that to cause a silver-mirror reaction to form a makeshift mirror. For some reason though, the surfaces of the mirrors were treated with magic

These mirrors were placed at varying angles on the walls facing this empty area.

This is surely the work of the enemy.

Now the problem is— Why did they do such a thing...?

“No... That can’t be...!?”

He completely understood.

Cross had long understood the intent of the enemy.

It was because he understood, that he felt a devilish chill across his body. The opponent’s strategy couldn’t help but make his blood feel cold and his body feel uneasy.

Cross’ mind went blank for a few seconds, delaying his warning to his colleagues. He simply did not want to admit that there existed a person who could pull off such an absurd feat. He simply did not want to accept that such a nightmare would soon become a reality.

All the sniping done until now was merely toying with us.

They had never fired at us directly— They’ve been firing from somewhere far-away at these mirrors using [Lightning · Pierce], and using the ricochet to hit our arms and legs with pinpoint accuracy—

“EVERYONE, GET AWAY FROM HEREEEEEE—!”

Cross cried out with all his might.

At the same moment as his cry—

Beyond one of the alleyways leading to this empty expanse, far away from the avenue leading into it—

Came a flash of light.

Several bolts of lightning cut through the darkness and struck Cross’ defenseless team one after another—

--.

----Half an hour since the beginning of the duel.

In the end, it seemed that Sistina, who had experienced a life-or-death magic battle during the earlier incident, had a slight edge.

As both had reached the limits of their hand of spells and the bottom of their reserves of magic power—

“<Obstruct and reject · Oh Barrier of storm · Bring tranquility to those legs>--!”

Sistina skillfully took advantage of the delay between spells caused by the fluctuation of the mana biorhythm to pull out her final trump, her own modified spell, the modified black magic [Storm · Wall].

“Huh—!? What is that spell—!?”

Faced with an unknown spell, Heinkel immediately erected an [Air · Screen] in response. However, the wide-area wall of wind still completely sealed his movements. His own impatience and quick-handedness had robbed him of the time he would have had to consider his spell options.

To ensure her victory, Sistina mustered up the last of her magic power, and chanted [Gale · Blow] with all her might.

“Take this! <Oh the great winds>--!”

The force of [Storm · Wall] in addition to [Gale · Blow] managed to barely break through Heinkel’s sturdy [Air · Screen]—

“U-, Uwaaaaaaaaaaaahh—!”

Heinkel’s body was immediately blown away from the stage.

.....

There was a brief moment of silence—

“I-, it’s over—! Out of boundssssssssss—! What in the world, what in the

worlddddd—!? Class two, that class two has wonnnnnnnnn—!”

In the following moment, the audience rose into a standing ovation.

There is was no longer a matter of enemy and ally, winners and losers, or classes and years. This was pure applause for the spectacular duel that had just taken place.

Harry, the only person unsatisfied by the outcome, dropped his shoulders in mortification.

“Hah—Hah— F-, Finally...”

After the close victory, Sistina powerlessly fell to one knee due to the vicious exertion and fatigue.

“We did ittttt—!”

“Yeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeah—!”

The students of class two flew out of the seats and ran towards Sistina.

“Eh!? Ah, kyaa-!”

Her rowdy classmates tossed her into the air without a care for her bewilderment. The students ecstatically celebrated Sistina’s victory.

“...Well done.”

Albert observed Sistina and the class from afar, and murmured in a voice no one else could hear.

“My, could anyone have expected such a turnout!? This Magic Games Festival was truly filled with many twists and turns, back and forths! And so, with the end of the ‘Duel’ event, today’s Magic Games Festival for second years has come to an end! To the guests here today, thank you again for coming so far to attend! To the students, well done all of you! After this will be the closing ceremony and the awards ceremony. The commentary has been brought to you by me, Earth from the executive committee. Thank you all for listening—!”

In contrast to the lingering excitement in the stands, the V.I.P. stand was solemn as a wake.

“The festival is over now, isn’t it?”

Alicia called out to Zeros, who kept a watchful eye.

“...So it appears.”

“I have the duty to present the representative of the class with their commendations... Would you allow me to do that?”

“...Of course I do not mind. However, I must accompany Your Majesty there, for I must act protect Your Majesty from any extenuating circumstances... And Serika-dono.”

“What is it?”

“Would you like to come with her Majesty and I?”

“...Hmpf, you don’t need to ask me.”

Serika rose from her seat with a languid expression.

“Hey, Zeros.”

“What is it?”

“I understand your loyalty, but... could you please stop this?”

“I cannot.”

Zeros firmly refused.

“The nation must not be allowed to lose its Empress. For that cause, the sacrifice of others is a fair price to pay.”

“...But...”

“I understand that how much this pains you, Your Majesty. However... I cannot comply. For Your Majesty’s sake, for the nation’s sake, Your Majesty’s daughter... Her Highness

Princess Alumiana must be killed.”

“...-!”

Alicia bitterly closed her eyes.

“Now let’s us go Your Majesty, to recognize the efforts of the young ones who will uphold this empire’s future.”

Alicia fell silent. Serika, who sat next to her, whispered to her.

“Let’s go, Alice.”

“!”

“... Glen... Believe in him.”

Receiving Serika’s words of encouragement, Alicia nodded her head and rose from her seat.

CHAPTER 6

TRUTH, THE VEILED MALICE

The closing ceremony of the Magic Games Festival proceeded in a solemn manner.

The students were assembled into neat rows on the field, the opening words of the ceremony were said, the national anthem was sung, the congratulatory address by visitors was given, and the results were announced... Not a second was wasted as the itinerary was gradually completed.

The general sequence of events were no different from that of the previous years. However, there remained one factor that brought forth the excitement of the students – the Empress’ participation in the ceremony.

Finally, it was time for Alicia to present the awards. Behind her stood Zeros and Serika, the commander of the royal guard and the academy’s prided seventh-rank magician. There was nothing to complain about when it came to the choice of bodyguards. In this moment, there was probably not a single person who could harm Alicia.

“Now then, Her Majesty the Empress will hereby bestow the medal to the class with the greatest performance in this festival. May the representative of class two please come to the stage. Please give him a round of applause.”

The sound of applause came from the crowd.

The instructors in charge of each class sighed in envy. A personal bestowment of rewards by the Empress was a once in a lifetime honor. On top of that, Glen Ryders from class two would be the one to receive that honor. Even though he had followed the rules and beat them fair and square, the other instructors could not hide their jealousy.

“Gungngngng—!? How could this happen! I... A fifth-rank magician... lost to the third-rank Glen Ryders...-! I lost to that man who doesn’t even carry a shred of pride as a magician...!?”

Harry gritted his teeth and tore at his hair in frustration.

“Harry-sensei... If you keep clawing your hair like that you’ll damage it you know? Considering you’re at an age where your hairline—”

“Shut up! Keep your mouth shut if you’re just going to say something unnecessary!”

Harry loudly rebuked the students who were about to say something rather cruel and distasteful and began to think about what to do after the competition

My loss is rather humiliating, but the loss of three months of wages also hurts.

I will surely become a remarkable figure who will eventually become a sixth, if not seventh-rank. However, I need to bring results deserving of a promotion. I cannot allow my magic research to be stopped in its tracks like this.

However, thanks to my loss in this bet, my research funds are grievously insufficient—

“Damnit... Where do the Shroty trees grow in this academy? I can relieve my meal expenses if I can find some of those branches... AH, what am *I* of all people thinking!? How can a proud magician like myself be allowed to drop so low! Ah damnit all! Why has this happened to me! Damnnnnnnnit! I won’t forgive you, I won’t forgive youuuuuu Glen Ryderssssss—!”

Then—

As the applause began to die down, the sounds of murmurs and whispers began to spread.

“...Huh? Those two are...?”

As Alicia looked down at the stage, her gaze attached itself to the figures weaving through the crowd.

It was not Glen, but rather, a familiar boy-girl duo.

“Albert...? And Riel...?”

“... You’ve come.”

Ignoring Alicia's perplexment, Serika uttered those few words.

Doubtful about the situation, Zeros then whispered to Alicia.

"...Your Majesty, is that man the instructor of class two, Glen Ryders?"

"No he's not... but..."

Then—

"Hey old man."

The cold-expression bearing Albert suddenly said such in a tone not befitting of his appearance.

"It's 'bout time to bring an end to this stupid mess."

"What, did you say...?"

Then, the Albert-lookalike softly chanted a spell.

The air around the boy-girl duo suddenly distorted—

When the two came into focus again, what appeared was—

"Y-, You bastards are—!?"

"Y-, You bastards, who the hell are you two!?" shouted Cross in disarray.

A few twists and turns had happened after that.

With indomitable spirits and unparalleled willpower, the royal guards continued their pursuit.

Even if the members could no longer fight, their feet never stopped. They continued to chase, chase, chase—

And so—

Finally, after all this, they had surely cornered their target, they thought.

They had reached the dead-end of a narrow alleyway.

On the surrounding rooftops there were several soldiers already lying in wait.

The royal guards who later participated in this pursuit had gathered all their forces together. Even though they had been defeated in every encounter until now, this time, their target definitely had nowhere to run.

They would finally grasp victory which had eluded their hands until now, they thought— But then—

The two cornered figures suddenly transformed and became different people.

In the face of this inconceivable turn of events, Cross wanted to cry from the bottom of his heart.

“Is it ok now? Albert.”

“Mhm. In any case, it seems the other side has managed to make contact.”

The cause of his vile torment said even more things that he could not understand.

“Damn it all! W-, Who the hell are you bastaaaaaaaaaards!?”

“I don’t see a reason to answer.”

“Imperial Court Magicians special operations sect, executor #7, Riel of ‘the Chariot.’”

“.....”

“.....”

Riel’s soft murmur silenced everyone in the area.

“...Do you understand what you’re doing? We’re here on a classified mission remember? Even within the Imperial Army, the existence of our group is one that is highly confidential.”

“I don’t get it, but okay.”

In front of the duo who began a strange comedy-skit, Cross recomposed himself and clenched his trembling fists.

“Court magicians... no wonder... Damnit, we fell for it so easily!? Unit two, three, four! Seize these two! The rest of you report to the commander and begin tracking our real target—”

“It’s better for you not to.”

Suddenly, two bolts of lightning burst through the air.

“Gyaa—!?”

“Guha-!?”

The guards struck by Albert’s magic fell to the floor.

“T-, That was a delayed activation of a chanted spell... and double cast!?”

“Don’t worry, I held back. Let us *play* for a bit.”

Albert, who stood still with his outstretched finger, coldly announced.

“Y-, You... You’re planning to resist... in this situation... with this difference of numbers?”

“Resist? No. I will b—”

“It’s better to not beat them up.”

Albert held the warlike Riel back by her hair.

“With this difference in numbers, we would be at a disadvantage in a direct confrontation. Not to mention, our job here is to be a decoy. So we should treat our opponent accordingly. We just need to stall for time.”

“I got it. Leave it to me. I will cut them all up.”

Without a change in complexion nor expression, Albert closed his eyes in resignation.

“... At the very least, don’t kill them. They’re not related to the faction pulling the strings and they’re still our allies. They just haven’t opened their eyes to the truth yet.”

“I’m going! I will..... beat... our enemies! Iiiiiiiya—!”

Riel crouched and burst forward in an explosive rush. As she dashed, she placed her hand on the ground and created a large sword in an instant.

“...”

Coldly watching her charge off into the enemy without another word, Albert calmly began to chant a protection spell.

At the center of the Magic Games Festival’s center stage, in the open area in front of the awards podium—

Lumia and Glen’s sudden appearance from the distortion prompted Zero’s reflexive shout..

“How could it be!? Lumia-dono, right now, you should be in the middle of town with that magic instructor—”

The guests who sat in the stands and the students who stood in neat lines couldn’t quite understand what happened. All they could do was look onto the stage from afar in confusion.

Amidst the commotion, Glen proudly revealed his trick.

“We swapped with my buddies earlier using [Self · Illusion]. Man, they were really taken for a spin with such a simple trick. You should really educate your subordinates a little more, no?”

“Ku-! Guards! What are you all waiting for!? Arrest these insurgents!”

Zeros covered Alicia behind him and yelled out an order. Immediately, the guards stationed at the stadium perimeter regained their senses and collectively drew their

blades, charging forward to seize Glen and Lumia.

“Serika, please—!”

At Glen’s cry, countless lines of light flashed across the ground.

A barrier was instantaneously erected at the center of the stage, enclosing Glen, Lumia, Alicia, Zeros, and Serika within. The towering barriers of light cut off the inside from the surroundings and kept the soldiers from approaching Glen.

“~~~~~! ~~~~~!”

The soldiers outside pounded the walls of the barrier with their fists and shouted something, but their voices could not reach those who were enclosed inside the barrier.

“Oho? An isolation barrier that even screens out sound? That’s quite thoughtful of you, Serika.”

Serika showed a wide grin at Glen’s praise.

When had the barrier been constructed? From Serika’s outstretched left palm appeared a pentagram formation built with lines of light. Sounds of a ringing bell could be heard from the hand—

... As I thought.

Everyone but Sistina, who had foreseen the development that unfolded on stage, failed to hide their bafflement and surprise.

I thought something was a little strange...

She had thought that the Empress’ V.I.P. stands had been unusually busy since Lumia had gone missing, but if that had been the only abnormality, then Sistina wouldn’t have given it any more thought.

However, Glen and Lumia had returned with changed appearances and voices, obstinately hiding their true identities as they approached Sistina. Since she knew of

Lumia's history, it wasn't difficult for her to imagine that some peculiar situation had arisen.

The black magic [Self · Illusion] creates an illusion to transform the user's appearance. Touching it directly would allow one to feel that something is out of place... Not to mention, I definitely wouldn't mistake how her hands feel.

Yet despite having unraveled the mystery, there remained a decision to be made. *Should I force them to tell me? Or should I not?*

She and Lumia were friends that were close enough to be sisters. If Lumia was involved in some sort of trouble, she naturally wanted to help her. She would help even if she wasn't asked to. That much was a given.

However... Lumia had told her this.

—'Believe in us.'

It was not plea for help, nor was it a request for involvement... she had merely been asked to 'believe in us'.

In that case, she would believe.

That was form of the friendship she took pride in.

Still, I feel a little annoyed that Lumia would rather ask that guy for help than me ...

Whilst she couldn't quite understand the gloomy feelings that arose in her heart, she looked distantly towards the two on the other side of the barrier, where they confronted the Empress.

Sistina couldn't form a concrete understanding of what was happening in the moment. Furthermore, with the barrier preventing any sound from passing through, she couldn't even try to get a grasp of the situation either.

Even so—

Sensei... Save Lumia... Please...

She joined her hands together in front of her as if she were praying.

“Serika-dono... Do you intend to betray us now!?”

Zeros scornfully gazed at the barrier, and howled at Serika with seething fury.

“...”

However, Serika remained silent and aloof.

“Damn, how did it come to this...”

Zeros couldn't help but grit his teeth in frustration.

The people not involved in this incident could only stare in puzzlement, unable to understand the situation.

“Now that the side characters have taken their leave...”

Glen snapped his fingers and turned towards Zeros.

“Hey old man, what's the deal with all this? Do you get what you're doing?”

“Gl—”

“Your Majesty, forgive my presumptuous attitude, but let me tell you what this old man has done. He misused your authority in an attempt to bring harm to an innocent girl, that being, Lumia.”

“...”

Alicia stared at Glen.

“Rest easy Your Majesty, everything is over now. Lumia is safe and sound, and the royal guards who were keeping you restrained are stuck outside the barrier. There isn't anyone here that can hold you down through force. I know that old man is stupid strong, but he isn't really a match for both Serika and I if we were to go up against him.”

“Damn you traitors...-!”

“Dum-bo, just who is the traitor here? Anyway, this will all be over once Your Majesty gives the word. Hey, you wouldn’t ignore an imperial order given personally by Her Majesty would you?”

This is finally over – Glen thought.

I still don’t really understand what’s going on, but either way, the problem itself is resolved. I can take my time to ask questions later if I really need to. Heck, this wasn’t really my job to begin with.

As Glen lost himself in these thoughts—

“Zeros.”

“Yes... What is it, Your Majesty?”

“By my command... That girl, Lumia Tinsel, is to be executed.”

Alicia uttered these unexpected words.

“...Huh?”

“—!?”

Glen froze up. Lumia turned pale.

Regardless, Alicia continued to show an ice-cold expression as she calmly continued.

“With regards to my position, that girl is someone who mustn’t exist.”

“Hey... Your Majesty, what are you saying...?”

As Alicia spouted unimaginable words, this time, it was Glen’s turn to fall into disarray.

“It would be better if she were never born. I never once loved you. ‘Why must this child exist in this world?’ I’ve often thought... This is a regret I will never live down.”

“T-, That’s...”

Even Lumia couldn’t withstand her mother’s statement.

“Do... Do you really believe that? Is that what you truly feel...? What about the kindness you showed me...? What about the warmth you’ve given me...?”

Her body trembled as she drew away, but even so, she asked those questions as if clinging on to dear life.

“Mhm, all of it was a lie. With how toilsome and tiring these governmental duties are, sometimes it’s nice to play around with something for a change of pace you see? That’s why, you should die with the regret of having been so foolish and disobedient.”

Subjected to such cruelty, tears welled up in Lumia’s eyes as the strength left her body.

“N-, No, wait a second Your Majesty! Why are you saying such heartless words...?”

In contrast to Glen’s growing unease, Zeros regained his strength.

“F-, Fuha, Fuhahahha! So you finally understand, Your Majesty! How’s that, scum!? This is Her Majesty’s true will! Justice resides with me!”

“Tch—!”

I totally miscalculated. I thought that if we could meet the Empress, the situation would resolve itself. I’m here ‘cause I believe in Serika, but it was completely beyond my expectations for the Empress to say this.

“I see, now that I think about it, Serika-dono did not betray us... because the traitors are trapped within the barrier! There’s nowhere for you to run now, is there?”

“Goddamn...”

“Now then, the only thing left to do is to dispose of the traitors... I will personally perform the final rite!”

Zeros’ body filled with murderous intent as he drew his swords.

With a rapier in each hand, it seemed that Zeros employed a dual-blade style.

His footwork didn’t seem to leave any openings to exploit as he approached Glen one step at a time.

“Oi Serika!? Do something would you!? Hello Serika, you there!?”

“...”

However, Serika didn't reply. She closed her eyes and solely focused on maintaining the barrier. No matter how frustrated Glen was, all he could do was grit his teeth.

Damnit Serika, didn't you friggin' say that everything would be ok if we got to the Empress!? Are you sure you didn't mean to say that we'd find ourselves trapped in a desperate pinch instead!? She's not actually trying to screw me over is she!?

Glen stood in front of the grief-stricken Lumia, who had fallen to her knees, in an attempt to protect her.

...What now!? ...What should I do!? Zeros is different from the other soldiers who are lacking in combat experience! He's survived the frontlines of the war forty years ago, the real deal!

Sweat trickled down Glen's forehead.

Zeros approached Glen with steady steps. With each approaching step, the presence of death grew progressively thicker like an encroaching mist. Glen could feel the pressure running down his spine. The way in which Zeros approached was like the relentless advance of a death god.

What the hell is this anyway!? What's happening!? Why is Her Majesty saying such impossible things!? Not to mention, she's not being asked, threatened, or controlled. She really means it!

Zeros would soon be within striking distance.

In the next moment after that, Glen would be cut down — Dead, Killed.

Shit! There's nothing I can do at this distance against this old man! If I try to start chanting now I'll just be killed before I can finish...!

The distance between the two was already within close-quarters range. It would prove hard enough to complete a one-stage spell, but just what could Glen do when he could only use three stage spells? The barrier behind him blocked his retreat, not to mention, he couldn't back down with Lumia right behind him.

...I'll have to do something don't I...!?

With grim resolve, Glen raised his fists into a traditional fist-fighting stance.

Undoubtedly, Glen had a held a lot of confidence in his hand-to-hand combat ability.

If he had to put it into words, he would say that he was better at it than any aspect of magic.

But even so, would his combat skill be of any use against this monster...?

Sorry... Lumia... Even though I brought you here to get rid of those loathsome thoughts, it turned out like this...

Perhaps Lumia had already given up. She grasped tightly onto the locket that hung around her neck, closed her eyes, and lowered her head in a stance of prayer.

As the god of death continued to approach, Glen felt a wave of anxiety surge across his back. Although he felt a strong impulse to immediately run away, Glen took a step forward to attack with reckless abandon—

It was then that a flash of realization passed through Glen's mind.

Now that I think about it... Why did the Her Majesty choose to this moment to say such things?

'With regards to my position, that girl is someone who mustn't exist.'

'It would be better if were never born. I never once loved you. 'Why must this child exist in this world?' I've often thought... This is a regret I will never live down.'

It's strange no matter how I think about it. Even if Her Majesty really believed that, she could have just said 'Kill her' and that would be the end of story. Why did she have to go out of her way to hurt Lumia... Why did she have to say such unnecessary things? Not to mention, all of it were lies... Why did she have to do it in this situation?

Glen looked towards Alicia's nape, and then to Lumia's joined hands.

If I had to say what was strange about this... what about the matching lockets? Her Majesty treated it like a treasure, but she isn't carrying it around today...

Glen's thoughts began to race.

There's no mistaking that none of what she's been saying reflects how she really feels, but if that's the case, then why? I understand that she can't say how she actually feels in public, but did she really have to go out of her way to say the exact opposite? What are her lies supposed to mean? Is Her Majesty someone who would do pointless things? Or does she have no choice but to lie... Maybe... there's some reason as to why she can't say the truth?

Then, he remembered.

He remembered what Serika had told him.

—I'll say this one more time alright Glen? I can't do anything, and I can't say anything either.

—You're the only one who can break through this situation. Yes, you're the only one.

Now that I think about it, there has to be some reason why Serika refused to tell me anything. She must be also hinting at something with the way she's stubbornly maintaining the soundproof barrier. I get that she wants to tell me something, but what is it?

Since this barrier is cutting us off from the outside world, this should be a situation where anyone can say whatever they want, but they're still not saying anything. They're still trying to convey something through their actions... which in itself means that the current situation is pretty dire isn't it?

And there's something I can do that Serika can't... What is it?

No way... Could it be—?

In truth, it was mostly a hunch.

The moment the thought flashed through his mind, Glen immediately spoke.

“Your Majesty, that necklace of yours... is quite pretty. It suits you quite well.”

Zeros froze in place in response to Glen’s odd statement. Lumia turned her eyes towards Glen, Serika opened her eyes and revealed a broad triumphant smile, and Alicia’s cold visage warped into a warm smile.

Lumia aside, everyone’s reactions were strange.

“Is that so? This is my ‘favorite’ so to speak.”

Despite her coldness moments prior, she now spoke in a merry and serene manner.

“Your ‘favorite’ huh... I see I see. Isn’t it a bit gaudy though? I mean, don’t your shoulders feel tired? Won’t it be better to take it off?”

Glen rubbed his shoulders in a joking manner.

“Fufu, that won’t do. I don’t want to take this off. Not at all.”

I get it now. This odd manner of speech that she’s using... There’s no mistaking it.

“...Gotcha’, Your Majesty.”

Finally, finally Glen understood.

The truth behind this incomprehensible incident, and the malice that had caused this cryptic situation.

“What... are you trying to do...!?”

Glen showed a fearless smile and Zeros, finding this uncanny, shouted to intimidate him.

“Isn’t that obvious? We’re gonna get that necklace off.”

“What... did you say?”

“Hey old man. Could you like, put you swords back? There’s no need to use those against me.”

Zeros raised an eyebrow.

“Your bluff is too shallow, magician! Try anything funny and I’ll cut you down right here!”

“Well, of course you’d react that way huh... I realized a little too late didn’t I? Now that I’m already within range I don’t have any time to convince him now do I... but first... Hey, Lumia?”

Hearing her name called out without warning, Lumia raised her head.

“All said and done... Your mom... she really does love you—” said Glen.

He then looked behind Zeros and exchanged glances with Alicia.

Alicia firmly nodded in response.

Receiving that gesture, Glen quickly moved his left hand.

The brief moment was extended endlessly as the mind was pressed to its limits—

Magicians wielded magic using their left arm which resided closer to the heart.

Zeros, who noticed that action dashed forward like a gale without a moment’s hesitation.

“I won’t let you—!”

He left behind an afterimage where he was. It was a godspeed step that didn’t seem possible for the human body.

Glen broke into a cold sweat in the face of Zeros’ haste, which seemed to push the limits of reality—

He desperately moved his left hand, but its movements were dull in comparison to

Zeros' lightning speed—

—In the next moment, a flourish of blood came forth.

“I do not know what you were attempting... but you are too slow, magician.”

“Ga—!? Agh—...-!?”

Zeros thrust his right sword forward, which pierced through Glen's left arm.

As for Glen's left hand— there were no traces of any magical phenomenon.

There was still one more sword in Zeros' left hand.

Should the sword go on to pierce Glen's heart, it would all be over – Glen would die.

“This is over, magician!”

“N-, No— Sensei—!”

As Zeros readied his blade, Lumia cried out—

The blade point cut through the wind, generating a shrieking noise in its wake.

The silver steel gushed out towards its target.

Just before it could pierce Glen's heart—

In the corner of Zeros' vision, a flash of green light fell from above.

“Wha—”

For some reason, Zeros' eyes intently followed the path of the light.

The light leisurely fell to the floor with a '*clink*' sound, bouncing once, twice, before falling to rest.

The true form of the light was Alicia's jade gemstone necklace.

In the following moment, Zeros' sword came to a halt as he looked on in shock. He turned to face Alicia—

And confirmed that Alicia had thrown it—

“Your Majesty, what have you done—!?”

His expression twisted into despair as he cried out—

—That action became the deciding factor in Glen and Zeros battle.

A momentous whirlwind sprang forth.

In the brief moment of Zeros' loss of composure, Glen, without hesitation, unleashed a roundhouse kick in a motion that was akin to a loosened spring.

Mustering all the strength he could, Glen leg mercilessly struck the side of Zeros' head with his right leg, knocking Zeros aside as he followed through with the kick.

“—GAAAAAAH—!”

The vehement blow sent Zeros tumbling violently across the floor.

The time that seemed to extend forever returned to normal as the rush of adrenaline subsided.



“Heh... It’s over now... Owowow...”

Allowing his left arm to hang from his shoulder, Glen announced his victory.

“Even if you’re a complete monster that survived that war, as long as you’re still human, you shouldn’t be able to get up for a while after eating a hit like that...”

“M-, My condition... does not matter here!”

Zeros attempted to stand up by using a sword as a cane, but he found himself unable to muster any strength from his hips and once again fell to the floor. As he fell, he cried out in agony and despair.

“M-, More importantly, what about Her Majesty-!? What happened to—!?”

“I’m fine, Zeros.”

“Wh...”

Zeros ghastly looked at Alicia’s bright and cheerful visage, and was left at a loss for words.

“I’m fine already... I’m fine, alright? So that’s enough...”

Alicia gently smiled.

Ignoring Zeros, who was taken aback by the turn of events, Glen hatefully peered at the jade necklace on the floor, and asked Serika.

“This is... a conditionally activated curse right? And that necklace is the carrier for the curse?”

Judging from the grin that formed on Serika’s lips, Glen confirmed that his speculation was correct, and continued.

“Curses that activate when certain conditions are met... Conditional curses are a rather orthodox method used in the history of magic. That said, this crappy necklace probably has the conditions ‘Kill the wearer should it be taken off’, ‘Kill the wearer should a set amount of time pass’, and ‘Kill the wearer should the information be disclosed to a newly introduced third party’. These three together make a reliable and

traditional trifecta set of conditions for a curse. Last of all, the condition for lifting the curse is most likely 'Kill Lumia'..."

'My my', Glen seemed to say as he shrugged his shoulders.

"So basically, whoever is targeting Lumia used the Empress as a hostage to achieve their plot. Well? How's that? This should be pretty close to the mark, right?"

"There are a few differences in the fine details of the curse conditions... but well, it's more or less correct."

Serika, who finally spoke, smiled as if trying to hold back a chuckle.

"So, in order to save the empress, the royal guards went nuts trying to kill Lumia. As for you, Serika, you were probably forced by the culprit behind all this to not extend any direct help to Lumia, as otherwise, the Empress' life would be endangered. That's why you created a barrier that seemed to trap us in at first glance, am I right?"

"Oh Glen, you're usually so slow and stupid, but why is it that you're so sharp now? Ah, you really are my prized disciple."

Glen, spent and exhausted, slackened his body and fell backwards to take a seat on the floor.

"Hah... Hey just saying, but couldn't you have given me a better hint...? I nearly died out there you know...? Geez..."

Glen vented his frustration to Serika, who appeared to be rather happy, as he scratched his head with a displeased expression.

"But you still understand what I meant so all's well isn't it? I 'believed in you' you see?"

"God, you're so shameless... And anyway, it's not because of you that I understood what was going on alright? It's cause Her Majesty kept saying those lies that weren't really possible coming from her, got it?"

"Eh...? Lies...?" Lumia reflexively uttered as she heard Glen's explanation.

Taken aback, Lumia turned to face Alicia.

Making eye contact with Lumia, Alicia returned an ambiguous smile akin to that of a child who was scolded after their misdeeds were discovered.

“You... What... What did you do...? Why didn’t the curse activate...?”

Zeros, who was still unable to grasp the situation, asked Glen.

“Sorry about that, old man Zeros. My left hand was just a feint, what I really wanted to do was done through my right hand.”

Glen showed Zeros the object in his right hand.

It was an old-fashioned card.

“...Arcana...? ‘The Fool’'s...

“This is my magic tool. By reading the magic formula created by converting the design of the fool, I can completely seal the activation of any magic within a certain area.

“What...?”

“Even curses are a type a magic. Under the effects of my original magic, [The Fool’s World], the curse will not activate even if the conditions are fulfilled. Well, I guess this is one of those times where ‘they all lived happily ever after’.”

“...T-, ‘The Fool’...? Sealing... the activation of magic...?”

Zeros opened his eyes as if realizing something, and looked Glen straight in the eye.

“I-, I heard rumors of this... In the Imperial court magicians, there was... Could it be, that you are...?”

“Who knows? I’m have no idea about what that is really.”

Glen abruptly turned his back towards Zeros.

“Now then, this dumb mess is finally ov... Ah wait, we still have to deal with the person behind all this... But well, I guess we can leave this aside for now.”

Glen look around whilst scratching his head. The students, instructors, and soldiers

who were kept outside the barrier didn't seem to understand what was happening and merely looked on in confusion.

"Now then, how do we explain all this...? Actually, how are we even supposed to bring this situation under control?"

Glen racked his head trying to think of ways to deal with post-matter events.

At approximately the same time—

Far away from the chaos of the academy, in the southern area.

In a deserted alleyway shrouded by the curtain of dusk, an inconspicuous silhouette skirted silently along.

"My, what a shame, I never thought that it would actually fail..."

However they didn't sound disappointed in the least.

Rather, it was as if they had found enjoyment out of wildcards that appeared in the midst of a perfectly planned game.

"Even though I finally managed to take Her Majesty hostage and seal the movements of the singularity Serika Alfornea... I suppose her title as a seventh-rank is not just for show, she is certainly quite cunning. Then, there is the matter of Glen Ryders... my, he is quite the awful joker."

Then, the giggling woman suddenly came to a halt.

"Oh... It seems that there is more to the empire than just idiots..."

At some point, two shadowed silhouettes had appeared before the woman.

"...We were given two missions. The first, was to observe the royal guards, whose movements have become more radical as of late. The other... was to perform a secret investigation on the close associates of Her Majesty the Empress." One of the figures

calmly said. “Recently, I felt that our movements were being tracked, but who would’ve thought the culprit would be the person whom I suspected the least? The head maid and secretary of Her Majesty the Empress... or rather, heretical magician of the Wisdom of the Heavens Research Society, Elenora Schalet.”



Immediately, the surrounding darkness began to thicken into a black cloud.

“A clear upbringing, an outstanding history, and unparalleled abilities... Looking back, your flawlessness in itself was suspicious.”

As Albert exposed the truth, the woman, Elenora, showed a chilly smile.

“Given a second thought, the royal guards began to move as soon as Her Majesty the Empress left her seat to seek out Princess Alumiana, when you made contact with Zeros and Serika. I was occupied with the notion that the royal guards were running amok, so I had failed to realize it then...”

“Oh dear, were you peeping at me with farsight magic? You certainly have some distasteful hobbies.”

“Answer me, Wisdom of the Heavens Research Society member. What is your organization’s goal? Assuming that Lumia is indeed Princess Alumiana... The terrorist incident in the academy and this incident... were both centered around the Princess. Furthermore, the previous incident was an attempted kidnapping, whilst this incident was an attempt at her life... I fail to see the consistency in these actions. What exactly is your organization plotting?”

“...‘Akashic Record’”

Albert slightly raised an eyebrow at Elenora’s cryptic response.

“Yes, our goal is the wisdom of the great sky, the ‘Akashic Record’... Perhaps... I will say that the Princess is necessary for that purpose... so to speak... chuckle chuckle”

Elenora raised her outstretch arms and looked towards to sky as she spoke in a drunken manner.

Faced with Elenora’s mannerism, Albert resisted the urge to pick apart her words and threatened.

“You make yourself hard to understand. I don’t know what this ‘Akashic Record’ is, but your goal has nothing to do with the life or death of the Princess... Is that right?”

“It would certainly be better if she were to live, but even we have a radical faction... There are also those in the organization whom are too hasty to act... Fufu, I went

through the trouble of planning a route for the retrieval of the corpse, down to the minutely fine details, but all that effort has all gone to waste it seems.”

“I see. So the reason you did not perform the deed yourself and instead manipulated the royal guards into doing so... would be because of that ‘route’?”

“I shall leave that to your imagination.” Elenora said as she smiled sweetly.

Faced with such a smile, Riel, who had stood silently beside Albert until now, deciding that she had enough of this needless discussion, and brusquely synthesized a great sword.

“Enough. Kill.”

“Wait, don’t kill her. Capture her and force her to spit out the information on their organization.”

“Don’t want to. Just kill. There’s no need to listen to a villain’s words.”

“...”

Albert, whose expression was not fazed in the slightest, decided to say nothing more as Riel readied her sword.

In an instant, the alleyway had blossomed with killing intent.

“Oh dear, how frightening.”

However, Elenora did not move and smiled placidly.

“Even so, fighting two aces from the special operations division will prove to be too much... This time around, it would be prudent to retreat.”

“You’re not getting away! Kill!”

Riel shot forward like a bullet, leaving a vortex in her wake.

Albert raised a finger forwards and began to chant a spell.

At the same time, Elenora moved her hands as if dancing, and began to chant a spell—

In an unknown alleyway in Fejiti, magical energies clashed against one another, accompanied by the sounds of heavy impact.

EPILOGUE

TO THAT PERSON, THREE YEARS AGO

The incident was wrapped up without any further issues.

With Zeros' surrender, the rampaging royal guards were calmed down.

After that, Alicia herself addressed the students about the events that befell her.

About how a terrorist organization that opposed the empire had entrapped her in a cruel ploy, and about how she had managed to survive thanks to the efforts of a brave magic instructor and a student.

It was also fortunate that Serika's barrier had prevented Glen and the Empress' discussion from leaking to any others.

Alicia addressed the national crisis in a seemingly casual manner and emphatically beautified the few grandeur moments. In the end, the Empress that challenged the world had used her masterful tongue to splendidly fool everyone that was present.

Although everyone was temporarily taken by unease and insecurity, the enthralled audience all calmed down in a matter of moments.

Finally, after the incident was fully addressed, the Magic Games Festival came to a peaceful end.

And then—

"...Thank god it's finally over... They keep pestering me to accept a third-rank medal imprinted with the silver falcon sword, but I just don't want it. It's like, you know, come on already..."

Glen trudgingly walked through the streets of Fejiti under the curtain of darkness.

After the incident, the academy administration called for an emergency meeting,

where they discussed the schedule for the bestowal of decorations for the ones who resolved the incident as well fine details of the matter concerning the royal guards. A long time had passed since then.

“Ugh, wasn’t I supposed to be the victim in all this...? So why do I have to be summoned to a hearing at a later date? What a pain.”

Without no attempt to hide his discontent, Glen grumbled and groaned. Lumia, who stood beside him, could only wryly smile.

“It can’t be helped. Nothing can change the fact that we were the central figures in this incident.”

“Well, you’re not wrong...”

“But isn’t it great that everything turned out nicely?”

“...That’s right I guess. No one was really hurt in the end.”

All said and done, I’d say that the royal guards who went nuts got a pretty light sentence compared to what they did. Now that I think about it, the judged was handled by the Empress herself, so no one could have really argued against it. Well, either way, it was Elenora’s betrayal that caused the chaos on the authoritative side of things, and the soldiers of the royal guard were simply following their orders from Zeros.

The official stance on Zeros, the commander of the royal guards, doesn’t seem to be too strict on paper either. He acted out in protection of the empress, so there’s a whole lot of room for mercy and negotiation.

That being said, that doesn’t mean all the loose ends have been wrapped up...

The most important piece in this incident is the one pulling the strings, Elenora, the head maid and secretary to Her Majesty the Empress. Albert and Riel chased after her, but it seems like she got away in the end.

The head maid under the Empress huh... Not to mention, this means that the Wisdom of the Heavens Research Society have encroached as far as the ‘lower-fourth seat’ of the noble hierarchy... This knowledge will probably be the spark that ignites a disturbance in the government. Just how deep do their roots go...

To be honest, Just this incident alone is scary enough.

Also... Lumia, what are you exactly—...?

Glen turned to glance at Lumia who walked alongside him.

Lumia's supernatural ability is 'Emotion Amplifier'.

A living magic circuit that can super-enhance a person's magic power and ability through touch.

It's a rare and extraordinary ability for sure.

But—

Would a magic association on the scale of the Wisdom of the Heavens Research Society really go this far to seize her?

I heard about the details from Albert earlier, and one way or another, that group wants secure her body above everything else. Her life and death doesn't really matter to them.

...'Emotion Amplifier' is a rare ability, but Lumia definitely isn't the only one out there. If they took the time to look for it they'd surely find another. With their resources, finding another wouldn't even be that hard. To start with, if they wanted to simply enhance the power of their magic, they could use rituals or formations. Okay sure, it's rare, but in magic terms, it's not something that holds absolute value above everything else. Despite that, they're still after Lumia. Just what do they want with her?

Her life or death isn't a problem for them either. I just don't get it; if she's dead, doesn't that mean she can't use her power? That much should be obvious.

There must be something about Lumia in particular.

Whatever the Wisdom of the Heaven's Research Society is looking to get their hands on, Lumia has it.

But what is it...? No matter how hard I think about it, I just don't get it.

"...Geez, as if I needed another entry on my list of troubles..."

“Sensei? Is there something wrong?”

Lumia raised her eyes with concern.

“Ah no, it’s really nothing. Well, I guess I can think about those annoying problems some other time.”

For now, I’ve protected what I wanted to protect.

I’ll just keep protecting them from here on out. That’s fine isn’t it?

“Ah sensei! I see it! That’s the place we’re going to.”

Pulling himself together, Glen turned his eyes towards where Lumia pointed to.

It was the restaurant that acted as the purveyor for the academy’s food. The restaurant had a fair reputation in the northern student district and was often the venue for banquets amongst the students. A large number of the students came from a wealthy background, but the restaurant gave the impression of being able to handle their vast needs to utmost satisfaction.

“Ah, so this is where our class is holding the celebration party?”

“Mhm, that’s what Sistina said.”

<TL Note: Not a typo, Lumia does use Sistina’s whole name here.>

Although they had encountered some trouble near the end, a win was still a win. As a result, Glen had won the prize money as well as the bet with Harry. With his ego and purse both bloated, Glen had then told the class that ‘It’s my treat, so do whatever you like and party as you guys see fit’.

“They should’ve called it a night by now right? Wouldn’t they be at home already?”

“Well, let’s take a peek just in case, sensei.”

“I guess it wouldn’t hurt to check.”

Glen and Lumia entered the store together.

“...I guess they’re still at it.”

It was hard to put the following scene in words.

The interior of the store was decorated with a vast amount of polished oak furniture. On top of the linear assortment of round wooden tables, across from the austere designed counter seats, was an orderly arrangement of glasses and alcohol. The flame of the candle glowed brilliantly as it shook under the gentle winds, the lighting inside the store was neither too bright nor too dim, creating a rather unique atmosphere.

Glen’s students had booked the entire venue and were in the midst of an extravagant banquet where they continued to eat and shout.

Although that incident had occurred at the closing ceremony, it hadn’t extinguished their excitement from the victory in the Magic Games Festival. Everyone carried a glass or snack in their hands as they talked about the various events of the festival.

“Yo, sensei!”

Noticing Glen’s arrival, Cashew raised a hand and called out to Glen.

“Sorry we started before you! Hey, sensei! How was my match today!?”

“Oh geez, didn’t you get wrecked in the finals? Do you really want me to say it?”

‘Hey man don’t say that...’ Cashew seemed to say as he turned to Gibel, who was seated beside him, with an insufferable expression. *‘There there’* Cecil said as he tried to comfort Cashew.

“Ah, sensei... thanks you very much for everything you’ve done today...”

“Well, I suppose thanks are due. Uhm... Either way, thanks to your support and advice, we managed to win today.”

Rin showed a bashful smile towards Glen, whilst Wendy embarrassedly turned her head to face away.

The other students all called out to Glen as well. The situation which was noticeably

different from when he first started as an instructor, made Glen reflexively open his mouth...

“...”

Suddenly, Glen picked up a bottle that was on the table beside him.

He finally recognized the old-fashioned label on the bottle.

‘Ryu Safeelay’, a wine produced in the Safeelay region from the highest quality, hand-picked grapevine trellises. The flavors were not only refined and vibrant, but they were also clear and easy on the tongue. Even the most prominent of nobles could not hold their praise for this wine. Well, simply put, it was expensive. Very, very expensive.

Thus, the countless number of empty, but identical wine bottles that littered his field of vision was nothing short of nightmare fuel.

“T-, This is... That famous, super-duper expensive wine... right?”

Noticing the bottle in his hand, Lumia retreated a few steps.

“...Oi, this is... What is, how, but why?”

As his blood curled, Glen managed to squeeze out a few murmurs.

All the students immediately looked away.

“A-, Ahaha... Someone must’ve made a mistake! Someone must’ve mistook this for grape juice, drank it and got all giddy-giddy, and the next moment... whaddya’ know? Tada, it’s empty!”

“Uhm, am I allowed to run away? Hey, can I just leave?”

<TL note: The usage of ボク(boku) in the above line indicates that Gibel is the speaker>

As his heart began to freeze over, Glen counted the numerous bottles that rolled across the ground.

Conclusion. The expenses of this venture would amount to the value of Glen’s special reward today, as well as three months’ worth of wages. Simply put, despite all his hard

work today, his net return was definitively 0.

I wanna cry.

“Goddamnit all!! Who did this!? Who in the heck’s world chugged this stupid expensive wine!?”

As Glen cried out with a full ensemble of teary eyes, quaking body, and paling visage—

“Sensei~!”

“Woah!?”

Glen desperately resisted the force that suddenly crashed against his flank.

Turning his eyes to his side, he saw Sistina. Whatever the case, it seemed to she had hurled herself onto Glen, and was currently hugging him.

“Ahaha-! You’re finally hereeee... Senseiiii...Ufufufufufufu....”

To say the least, she appeared to be rather drunk. Her upturned eyes brimmed with moisture, her face was beet red, and her legs failed to support her body as she threw all her weight onto Glen.

“What are y-, oh god you friggin’ stink! Wait, so you’re the culprit!? You damned hooligirl!”

In his immediate surroundings, the only one who seemed even remotely drunk was Sistina.

At this point, it was all too obvious. Rather, it would be better to say that this was the surprising yet irrefutable truth.

“Geeeee~~... Where did you go~`...Sensei~... Wif...out you here Sensei... I was really lonle~~~... It’s ruuu... to make a girl... wait...”

“Ah, come on! Get off me already! Don’t snuggle against me! Your face is too close! Why are you always so annoying!?”

It was hard enough to find the words to lecture someone so drunk, there was probably

no point in even trying.

Glen resigned himself to his fate as Sistina continued to press on.

“I... Today... Senseiiii... See you in different light...”

“...Huh?”

“Youuuu... pay more attenshun to us... than I ever thot... you would... And I don’t really get it... but youuu... helped Lumia... Soooo... Sensei... you’ve tranfuhmed or something... right? Actually... I undershooed everthing... but I read the muuud... and pretended not to notice...! Aren’t I amashing?”

“...Yeah yeah, you’re soooo amazing.”

To be honest, Glen didn’t really understand what Sistina had said through all her slurs and mumbles. He simply chose an answer that couldn’t go wrong.”

“Ufu, fufufufu! You’re also amazhing! I will... give you the right.... to marry... Lumia...”

“...Hah?”

“If possibulll... Uhhh... I want you... to choose me... Eh, what are you making me sayyyyyyyy, geeez! You idiot! AHAHAHAHAHAHAHA-!”

Sistina motioned to send Glen flying, but she instead tumbled across the floor.

“...Ah, what a pain.”

Glen looked amusedly at Sistina, who continued to smile as she curled into a ball.

“Oi Lumia. What’s the plan?”

“I’ll get her into a seat at the very least. If she sleeps on the floor she’ll catch a cold.”

“Alright, then I’m gonna go get some water or something. I’ll leave her to you.”

“Okay.”

“Ah... Sensei is going away... even thuh he jus got here....”

“Mhm mhm, it’ll be fine. Sensei won’t run away.”

“...Reallly? Really, really...?”

“Geez, you really like to be pampered, don’t you Sisti?”

With his back turned on the intimate sisters-like exchange, Glen left the store.

The energy in the hall faded in a naught but a fleeting moment.

Glen’s students seemed to be no exception.

After the banquet.

“Hah... Finally some peace and quiet...”

Glen sat at one of the seats on the counter with his head in his arms as he let out a long sigh.

The students formed their own groups and left for home. The bustle in the restaurant moments ago seemed as if it had been made up given how quiet it currently was.

Although it was already past closing time, the bartender had taken notice of Glen’s lateness and made an exception. Thus, despite the fact that the kitchen, storage room, and wine racks were locked, the store remained open. The store had also lent a blanket for the drunk Sistina.

The bartender instructed that once Glen had emptied the brandy bottle he used to drown his sorrows, he should leave through the back door. Only the stores in the student district would be so lenient however.

Glen took a fleeting glimpse behind him.

Covered with a blanket, Sistina slept with her body leaned on the table in front of her. It seemed that she was having some sort of wonderful dream, sleeping soundly with a bright smile.

“...Hmpf.”

Clang... the glass in Glen's hand rang. Although it was some sort of cheap alcohol that he couldn't even remember the name to, he was unable to get drunk. No matter how much he drank, he couldn't get his mind off of today's bill, sundries, and the colorful variety of impending problems.

"...Good work today, sensei."

After finally putting Sistina to rest and taking care of her needs in a thorough manner, Lumia returned.

"May I sit beside you?"

"Sure."

Receiving Glen's permission, Lumia seated herself on right side beside Glen.

The warm light of the lamp on the table illuminated the two through the faint darkness.

Lumia tactfully took the bottle and refilled his cup little by little.

"How does it taste?"

"...Terrible."

Lumia could only show a wry smile at Glen's sulky reply.

The time of peace and quiet passed by in a serene manner.

After all that had happened today, it was as if they had been given this gentle time to relieve the burdens of the heart.

Finally—

"Say.... Have you sorted things out between you and your mom?" Glen said as he lightly put down his glass.

"Yes" said Lumia, showing a gentle smile. "After that, I talked with her about many things. What I'm unsatisfied with, what I've always wanted to say, everything... After all that, I felt refreshed. Hehe, I'm an idiot aren't I? Why did I act so stubborn back

then?”

“...Wouldn’t anyone have done the same?”

Clang.

Glen shook the ice in his glass.

“Everyone has things they can’t let go. Until recently... you know, before I was occupied by the stuff that has happened one after another, I’d stopped thinking for myself...”

“Is that so? But... it’s thanks to you that my problems now solved.”

“I didn’t really do anything.”

Saying that, Glen pushed the empty glass towards Lumia.

Lumia refilled the glass with the amber alcohol with a smile.

Then—

“Hey sensei... when did you remember? About how you saved me... about what happened three years ago.”

“...I don’t get what you’re talking about.”

Although Glen had only taken small sips, he was now drinking by the mouthful.

“Promise.”

Lumia uttered a single word in response.

After emptying the glass, Glen quietly placed it on the counter.

“If you’re talking about back then... then there’s only one thing I remember clearly.”

“...”

In that moment, the two recalled the same event from three years ago. When Lumia had been exiled from the royal family, when she had been taken in by the Phebell

family... When she had been kidnapped by the group of heretic magicians.

—Please. There are still enemies around. We can't make it out with the way you are.

—Be afraid of me as much as you like, I don't mind.

—However, if you could stop crying... I'll be your ally.

—Even if the world is your enemy, even if everyone hates you, I will definitely be your ally.

—No matter when, where, forever and ever.

—So please... don't cry.

"I know it was just a means of getting me to stop crying, but I never thought that you would continue it all this time. Sensei, should I call you faithful, or perhaps tactless..."

"...A promise is a promise."

Glen turned his head to the side, pouting in discontent.

"But you know, it's not as impressive as you think."

Resting his chin in a hand, Glen noisily played with the glass again.

"When you were caught up in that kidnapping scheme that time, I was part of a sorta special sect of the imperial court magicians. Your mom... Her Majesty the Empress cried and begged for me to do it you know. 'Please save her. I know I have no right to say this, I know it's wrong to push you into such danger, but please save her.' she said. I was just seeing it through."

Yes. Only for her daughter who she had sent faraway, would the bold and resolved Empress shed tears.

That was why Glen had known the Empress had lied.

“You seem to be misunderstanding me a little... It was just my job you know. I’m not a magician of justice nor a hero. I’m just... a lowlife murderer by profession.”

“Even so.”

Lumia look at Glen’s visage, which had been overcome with anguish, and said.

“Because of that promise, I was saved. This time too...”

“Right?”

“Fufu, that’s unfair sensei... in many ways.”

“Don’t say things I don’t understand.”

With a bemused sigh, Glen poured himself a drink.

As he was doing so—

“Hey Sensei.”

Lumia shifted herself closer to Glen, and rested her head on his shoulder.

“...Lumia?”

Glen stopped his raised glass and cast a quizzical gaze.

“Just tonight.”

With a mutter, Lumia silently closed her eyes, and as if whispering—

“Just tonight... let me be spoiled like this... sensei...”

“...Do as you like.”

The gentle flow of time trickled silently.

The shaking flame, the wavering shadows.

The young girl’s silent breath and the warmth of her body. The intermittent clanging

of the glass.

Perhaps he was finally drunk. The depths of his mind went numb with a faintly hot sensation.

It was a very comfortable feeling... It seemed to make him believe that there was nothing to regret in what he had done today... A great relief for his tired body.

Like this.

The silent night, gently continued on—



Thanks for
Reading
this Volume!

AFTERART

Glen and Lumia are
really pleasant
together!! (´▽`*)



2014.11
Mishima Kurone

Translator's Afterword

Thanks for sticking with me all this time!
Volume 2 is (finally) over!

Usually, the text on the illustrator's afterart says "thanks for purchasing this volume!" when translated literally and it does feel kind of weird to change it for the fanTL.

That said...

I know that not everyone can afford it, but if you can, please purchase the books! They're available pretty cheaply via amazon.co.jp, kobo, and bookwalker as e-books online!

Also, as-per the survey, look forward to some style-changes in the next volume!



Till next volume!

- yuNS

www.crimsonmagic.me

re.yun.NS@gmail.com



PDF BY: TRAITORAIZEN